

PHILOSOPHICAL MUSINGS

(Or, Philosophical Research into Western Thinking)

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Philosophical Musings
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Chapter One

PHILOSOPHICAL MUSINGS

In the human intellectual activities of science and philosophy the supernatural has been eliminated; little by little it shall be eliminated from politics and social life as well. Everything in this life is natural.

Introductory Note

In the contemporary Western philosophical world, two systems of philosophy continue to confront each other: a philosophy of authority (its purpose being the formation of the individual) and a philosophy of autonomy or of experience (its purpose being liberty and an autonomous conscience). This chapter explores the philosophy of experience. Each of the headings explores a particular point. But the headings do not necessarily follow the scholastic order of an expository and systematic philosophical thesis. They are presented as general stream of continuous thoughts that sets out a common theme as the title of the heading indicates. These headings are sometimes well-linked and at other times not so well-linked. They are not intended to be instructive in the traditional sense of passing knowledge on to the reader (from the perspective of a *tabula rasa*), but are intended to awaken consciousness as a starting point for the reader's own philosophical activity. And according to the reader's subjective preference the ideas in the paragraphs may be rejected, or restated and re-emphasized, or personally re-ordered according to the experience and level of conscious understanding of the individual.

This chapter is not intended to be an objective instruction but a stimulus at the subjective level of philosophical consciousness at which the reader currently rests. This chapter is not intended as a philosophical polemic, but as a contemplation of the evolutionary stage of philosophical consciousness, which at the time of writing, reflects the author's mind. In reflecting upon a philosophical consciousness my intention is not to refute either a scholastic or phenomenological methodology. I write for those well-educated intellectuals who do not read for amusement only, but who read seeking reasonable clarification of their experience and arrive at accurate beliefs.

1. *Philosophical Generalities*

- My observation is that in the Western academia there has been an advance in the knowledge of most formal disciplines, except philosophy. The disciplines within modern science clearly lead the way here. However, within the thought of some contemporary philosophers there is the appearance of a new process of ordering knowledge. To be noted from observation is that every system of thought has its immanent logic leading to a point of intellectual perfection. Whether that point of intellectual perfection is *generated* by the mind or is *grasped* by the mind remains under discussion to this day. To be noted as well, is that the process leading to a point of intellectual perfection contains inconsistencies and insufficiencies which may lead to dissolution and ruin. In the contemporary philosophy of consciousness which I propose there is a shift from a hierarchical model of ordered understanding to a nodal model of ordered understanding. In a nodal order of understanding “order” often initially appears to be “dis-order” to hierarchical thinkers and is held to reflect the dis-ordered reflection, and even disordered personality, of the individual.¹ That is to say, to the *hierarchical* thinker, once consciousness has been initiated, there appears to be no standardized nor stable pattern that arises from within the consciousness of *nodal* thinkers. I suggest that each person’s pattern of nodal thinking, as opposed to hierarchical thinking, is unique because the intellectual model of the nodal thought process is constructed after a particular physical organ, that is, the individual human brain.

- This nodal ordering, which replaces the hierarchical order, is relational and may be philosophically studied as it appears in all other academic disciplines and their knowledge systems.² The subject matter of nodal ordering and subsequent expression is not restricted to the inherited categories of being and non-being, of substance and accident which are categories of ancient Hellenic philosophy. The basic direction of nodal ordering is horizontal, characteristic of a plane. It is not vertical, that is, characteristic of a perpendicular ordering. The vertical direction is characteristic of the hierarchical model. Drawing upon a popular image, a wagon wheel might best illustrate a simple nodal organization, (one centre with subsequent “centres” at the circumference), as opposed to a complex nodal organization. And a pyramid may illustrate a hierarchical organization.

¹ The nodal order, as a philosophical concept, is fashioned after the physiological pattern of the human brain. The many “centres” of the brain that receive stimulus are not related hierarchically, but are arranged organically.

² As a discipline, I hold that psychology, in particular clinical psychology, is the “shadow side of philosophy.” That is to say that in my experience most psychology is overwhelmingly preoccupied with the pathology of an organism which makes psychology a negative discipline.

- There is an on-going lack of agreement and tension, first within the individual understanding of a philosopher and subsequently in the understanding of a group of like-minded philosophers. Secondly, there is an on-going disagreement and tension between philosophical ideas as interpreted from the historical perspective and interpreted within the evolutionary perspective. In the West, the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th Centuries can be identified as a turning point in the thought of academics and other intellectuals as they reflected upon themselves and their environment. Their reflection revealed a diversity of understanding of human knowledge as interpreted within an evolutionary process and interpreted from an historical perspective. In my experience, contrary to a persistent and prevailing point of view, the evolutionary process is leading to a future of diversity as opposed to a future of unity.

- The cultural investigations undertaken by academics of the 19th and 20th Centuries focused attention, to some degree, on the philosophies of the Orient.³ The understanding of the human personality and how it orders its knowledge within various cultures is necessary for the proper understanding of contemporary philosophy. The philosopher has no inherent purpose beyond that of human understanding which is not evident in non-human life. Contemporary scientific understanding is not inherent in human life. It has been generated by modern human life. Contemporary philosophers are those that I identify as questioning the inherited schema of philosophy currently dominant in academia retaining a Hellenistic legacy. Philosophers, in general, assign meaning either through an imposed order (a reasoned hierarchical approach) or assign meaning by acknowledging dis-order (a reasoned organic nodal approach). Contemporary philosophers belong to the latter group. It is to be expected that contemporary philosophers will be in interpretive disagreement among themselves given the complex interdisciplinary intellectual currents of the present age. In this sense contemporary philosophy is not a parochial activity leading to unity.

- In the Western context, contemporary philosophy is an “open system,” with no boundaries of its own, as it were, interacting with other systems on *their* “boundaries.” The nodal structure of contemporary philosophy, established by philosophers through consciousness, displays no fixed

³ Mel Thompson’s observation makes the point that readers accustomed to western philosophy may be in for a shock when first introduced to Eastern or Oriental philosophy. Western philosophy has stopped playing the game and merely analyzes the rule book, he maintains. “At one level, Philosophy is an academic discipline, pursued in universities and presented in weighty tomes that may seem impenetrable to the outsider; at another, it is the natural activity of all thinking people. Everyone who has ever asked why the universe is as it is, or why we call one thing good or beautiful and another bad or ugly, or how society should be organized, is in fact engaging in Philosophy.” *Eastern Philosophy* London (1999:1) NTC Publishing Group.

boundaries of its own, but illustrates relationships between subject and object. Contemporary philosophy is about wisdom, not scientific knowledge, achieved through a conscious analysis by the living subject engaged in assigning meaning to information.

2. *The Scope of Contemporary Philosophy*

- Engaging in contemporary philosophy is not a cumulative activity, therefore it is not scientific in the modern sense of the term. Scientific facts do not carry meaning within themselves. They are like the moon, its light, (or meaning), is derived from another source, i.e., the sun, (or philosophy). Contemporary philosophy, being an “open system” of intellectual activity, cannot be characterized as a mechanical model. Thus, contemporary philosophy lacks the capacity to predict the future. Contemporary philosophy is a discipline of intellectual inquiry into the present state of human wisdom.⁴ (Artificial Intelligence is an unconscious machine knowledge and therefore cannot be understood as wisdom.) For their identity to be established within a cultural context, contemporary philosophers of wisdom cultivate their *difference* from traditional philosophers of knowledge.
- Contemporary philosophy requires a commitment to some pattern of reasoned thought. Reasoned thought arises from the interpretation of conscious experience. Contemporary philosophers tend to focus on the clarity of human thought and the coherence of meaning. Thus, philosophy, in the sense I describe it here, is not a universally standardized intellectual activity.
- Humans are suspended between birth and death, and at different evolutionary stages interpret their experiences within their conscious life. As philosophers grow in consciousness of themselves and their environment they inquire into the growth of societies and cultures. Their tendency to individuality within society increases their sense of self-consciousness. Among the phenomena which contemporary philosophers must self-consciously interpret are the belief systems and moral commitments of the peoples of different cultures. In inquiring into the phenomena of belief and morality philosophers transcend, or at least diverge, from the common sense of the masses, yet without becoming independent of them. Philosophically inquiring into social and moral phenomena means inquiring into the relationships among the phenomena in one’s environment. Philosophical inquiry is not undertaken in a

⁴ Somewhere in his publications Moritz Schlick (1882-1936) has noted that the clarification of meaning will be needed very badly in a great many questions with which we are concerned in our ordinary human life. Some thinkers will be especially gifted in this practical field. In such instances, the philosopher may not have to be a scientist, but in all cases, he will have to be a man of deep understanding. In short, he will have to be a wise man.

vacuum, and the questions that arise from contemporary personal experience may or may not have been adequately answered by earlier generations of inquirers.

- Philosophy, as presented here is an activity of the human intellect. And of itself the human intellect has no history. However, there is a history of its product, that is, a history of ideas. It is conceivable that a future generation may philosophize about the history of ideas and come to different conclusions than current philosophers. Philosophers are characterized by the questions they ask and the answers they accept about any issue. Some philosophers pose questions practically, others pose them theoretically. Enlightened philosophers will accept answers as subject to revision, other less enlightened philosophers will accept answers dogmatically. Contemporary philosophers inquire into matters of intention and meaning as they think about refashioning the world. From an ethical perspective, they contemplate the difference between “what is” and “what ought to be.” They begin their interpretation with experience which discloses the types of relations humans have within their environments. The environment which the philosopher interprets precedes the arrival of the philosopher in it. Thus, the philosopher arrives in a world that is already *in progress*, and that will most likely continue after the philosopher’s death. Contemporary philosophers, as agents, engage in a course of self-conscious activity in cooperation with other agents, that is, philosophers and authors who initiate their own activity. They also follow a course of self-engagement with other living and non-living beings, that is, actors who are not the authors of their own acts. In short, agents initiate action, actors respond to action.

- A philosophical perspective becomes enhanced when it allows for alternative interpretations which bring clarity to the various patterns of life with ramifications beyond the agent’s immediate concern. The philosopher, as part of the greater human community, transcends a purely personal preference in choosing the object of inquiry. Philosophers, in the company of artists, poets, politicians, economists, etc. have *something*, although not *everything*, to say about the human experience. An inquiry into the struggles of previous philosophers reveals to contemporary philosophers how these predecessors arrived, correctly or incorrectly, at their answers to the problems of life.

- Any philosophy that fails to enlighten thinking increases the confusion between a formal description of experience, i.e., knowledge, and a clarification of experience, i.e., wisdom, thus impeding contemporary philosophical advancement. Contemporary philosophy, as an intellectual activity, evolves into the future by educating a class of thinkers who subsequently re-position themselves within their

environment. In this sense philosophers are always in transition, enhancing themselves but never reaching a definitive state of existence. Often contemporary philosophers conceive *contrary* concepts about any *one* phenomenon as the object of their inquiry. In conceiving contrary concepts, philosophers provide particular ideological options, as well as, depth of insight from which others, i.e., artists, poets, academics and politicians may profit.

- Contemporary philosophers begin with experience and engage their imagination which has no limits and terminates nowhere. They, in fact, philosophize on the threshold of posthuman thought. Such philosophers direct their inquiries within a serious, not frivolous, life, and to that which is serious, not flippant, in life. And their experiences need to be translated into the language of a philosophy appropriate and adequate to their times. Unlike modern science, philosophy considered as a human activity has no clear beginning, nor is it circumscribed by boundaries that identify and determine its limits. Being a positive intellectual activity, unlike psychology, the act of philosophizing ceases when the philosopher engages in pathological inquiry.
- Contemporary Western culture no longer accredits philosophers from a political perspective as in the days of the “philosopher king.” This accreditation is not necessary in contemporary Western culture since philosophy, unlike many other academic disciplines, is not dependent on a specific model of political organization, or social pattern, or on a particular institution. It is, one may argue, the intellectual activity of specially motivated and trained individuals. Philosophy is, in fact, a human subjective activity of interpretation of experience or of some part of it. It would be incorrect to assume that this activity of human interpretation is as old as the term “philosophy.” It is not. Such activity is as old as humanity itself. Contemporary philosophers concern themselves primarily with questions of clarification, meaning and value, not with facts. Thus, they cannot isolate themselves from the inquisitive motivation of healthy human beings. One might say contemporary philosophers seek human perfection in this life, not in a transcendent utopia. Further, contemporary philosophers make up a community of thinkers whose thought is sufficiently “soft” and pliable such that it cannot be rigidly regulated. In short, contemporary philosophical thought is inherently dynamic. In light of the philosopher’s scope, I maintain that the known cosmos contains nothing superior to human inquiry.

3. *The Nature of Contemporary Philosophical Thinking*

- Contemporary Western philosophy is tantamount to a personal statement drawn from contemplating many sources. It remains incomplete at any stage of its evolutionary development. Usually, any advancement in Western philosophical thinking is a variation in understanding and emphasis of a present conviction rather than a rejection of an antecedent intellectual conviction. In short, Western philosophy usually advances as a continuum of thought. However, as a phenomenological understanding in philosophical thought becomes more accepted, variation in understanding emphasis as an approach to interpretation tends to be replaced by a fresh philosophical perspective.
- I am not of the opinion that a fresh perspective on philosophical thought, i.e., phenomenology, conceals an implicit consensus. Contemporary phenomenological philosophers focus on internalized meaning and values that remain individuated in a personality formed within a particular culture. Contemporary phenomenological philosophers analyze existential relationships that consist of an orderly and reasoned response within an environmental context. An orderly and reasoned response may be expressed either in a hierarchical form, or a nodal pattern. In this manner both overcome chaos and establish an equilibrium in understanding within a changing environment.
- However, a philosopher establishing an equilibrium within the environment need not retain the traditional hierarchical form. A philosopher establishing an equilibrium may utilize the nodal pattern of philosophical understanding which gives new insights into interpretation of experience. The hierarchical pattern is simple; whereas, the nodal pattern is complex. In a nodal pattern, to establish an equilibrium within an environment, it is necessary to conceive of multiple centres and varying ends or goals, rather than rely on a uniform philosophical purpose or objective. In conceiving multiple goals and ends, the contemporary phenomenological philosopher must make selections and adaptations in processing information since not all information is applicable to, nor even necessary in all cases of interpretation. The change from a hierarchical order to a nodal order reflects a practical shift within the Western philosophical perspective and its value system. Further, the nodal interpretive pattern cannot be absorbed

into a hierarchical form. Perhaps this insight is at the root of Charles Davis's perspective on ecclesiastical reform.⁵

- Considered as academic disciplines philosophy and modern science must remain distinctively separate, but epistemologically related. Contemporary philosophers, scientists, psychologists and sociologists are evolving in their intellectual interpretations. Should they stop evolving and become dogmatically fixed they would *ipso facto* cease to be “creative” human beings but only “repetitive” human beings.

4. *An Understanding of Human Activity in the History of Philosophy*

- It is generally agreed that the origin of Western culture is a blending of the Hebraic religious traditions and ancient Greek philosophy. However, my attention here is focused on the activity of contemporary philosophical thinking with occasional reference to the Hebrew and Greek legacy of reasoned thought. The normative conditions of contemporary philosophical thinking arise from a philosopher's or thinking agent's critical point of view. That is to say, in the last analysis, the interpretive activity of a contemporary philosopher assigns meaning to experience. Further, a group of philosophers may coalesce into a normative collectivity of meaning under certain social circumstances, that is to say a particular school of thought. This coalescence of normative activity often leads to a transfer of authority from a concrete individual (i.e., a monarch, or elected ruler) to authority being vested in a legal non-living artificial collectivity, (i.e., the state). In such a case the absolute authority of the monarch, or that of the elected ruler, becomes the dispersed democratic authority of the citizens of the state.
- In an egalitarian democracy the philosophical ideal of stratification, that is, the levels of competence and responsibility (i.e., collegiality) are established in theory. In an egalitarian democracy, individuals are private persons who pursue their own interests and whose subsequent negative influences within society might be overcome only through a community politically willing a common good. That is to say “a democratic good” is not an independent product of any evolutionary system, but is a generated product of the human intellect. It is achieved consciously through the will of human beings. Many contemporary philosophers attach the concept of universality to the living *presence* of human beings,

⁵ Gregory Baum notes: “Charles Davis interprets the present struggles of reform ... as so many indications that the institutional church is falling apart and that a radically new pattern of Christian life, *beyond confessional boundaries*, is emerging” [my italics]. *The Credibility of the Church Today: A Reply to Charles Davis* (1968:62) Herder & Herder.

which, in turn, is not restricted to the location of a particular environment. Humans may present themselves throughout the cosmos bringing their environment with them. Thus, humanity through its presence establishes the sense of universality through its philosophy. *Universalism* is the objective concept of Hellenistic philosophy; whereas *universality* is the subjective notion arising within conscious human thinking. Humanity itself is an abstract notion or ‘thought-picture’ whose collective will, in turn, generates the abstract concept of an ethical state. To my current knowledge, only the human life form actively generates the Western concept of the State whose citizenry enjoys a theoretical equality of citizenship. Humanity is always desirous of its own good (excepting pathological thinkers) but humanity, from a philosophical point of view, does not always distinguish in what its own good consists.

- From the point of view of many contemporary philosophers, humanity is a differentiated phenomenon distinguished by various forms of coherence, i.e., technology, religion, culture, anthropological studies, etc. To study these forms of coherence is to study what humanity *believes* itself to be, not what humanity *is*, that is to say, what constitutes humanity’s being which in the West is usually reserved to philosophy. While pursuing their philosophical ends, human beings establish relationships with one another, thus raising further issues concerning the legitimate and ethical means to attain their ends. In the West, the means to an end is usually undertaken within some form of dichotomous structure, i.e., essence and accident, body and mind, environment and heredity, true and false, absolute and relative, physical and metaphysical, etc. The contemporary philosopher, however, understands this dichotomy in terms of degrees of a continuum, not in terms of polarized absolutes. It is within the dichotomous structure of these polarized concepts that the “self” is consciously conceived as a unified object of social construction through the process of individuation (though not predetermined). Through being actively conscious one differentiates between the “me” and the “not me.”

5. *A Schema of Philosophical Activity*

- There are various kinds of philosophical schema that have been developed within human intellectual relationships. Philosophers distinguish how humans deal with one element as compared to another in their various schemas. In the Western tradition the identification of the kinds of philosophical schema is brought to light by contrasting the various concepts of ordering one’s experience of the world. This order is established within relationships of equality, or lack of it, and through authority, those who possess it and those who lack it. Each human being must find its proper place in a philosophical

order satisfying the relationship between equals and non-equals in a hierarchical or nodal ordering of experience.

- A properly ordered schema, hierarchical or nodal, is necessary to establish a continuity, or connectedness, among contemporary philosophers, but not a uniform way of thinking. Further, there are existential regularities that occur within their experience that are not explainable via biological factors, nor scientific deliberations. To establish a proper order within a contemporary philosophical schema requires an understanding of unity within plurality and plurality within unity.

6. *The Relationship Among Individuals and Their Respective Philosophies*

- The individual philosopher, while becoming more autonomous, still depends upon the solidarity of like-minded peers. Philosophical solidarity is a moral phenomenon which does not submit to precise observation or measurement, but it is a conscious process of human intellectual activity designed to sustain diverse relationships within a professional community. Ultimately, if successful, philosophical solidarity enjoys temporary stability and a relative precision of various regulatory laws within regional, national and international contexts. Philosophical solidarity will evolve according to the ability and will of conscious human beings.

7. *Differentiation and Variation in Contemporary Philosophies*

- The differentiation and variation in contemporary philosophies have their roots in the oral and written forms of these products of human thinking. That is to say, human sounds become pictographs or scribbled primitive words, which evolve into myth or poetry, which evolve into philosophy or modern scientific technology. This is the result of the evolutionary process of linguistics, (by philosophical architects of the future), not a chronological adaptation of linguistic structures, (by philosophical custodians of the past). However, in the Western context the antecedent of contemporary philosophy was not solely evolutionary in character, but was also characterized by the retention of certain aspects of classical antiquity rooted in the thought patterns of Plato and Aristotle. However, currently in many quarters of the Western tradition of philosophy there is an introduction of the comparison between Occidental and Oriental philosophical systems.

- In the contemporary philosophical Western context, there is a separation such that some philosophers favour a classical (objective) perspective and others favour a phenomenological

(subjective) perspective. The latter is the more recent from an historical point of view. An important feature of contemporary philosophy is the influence of the value system operating in a culture's philosophy. Examined historically, ancient Greek philosophy developed in terms of perfecting an understanding in a more sophisticated manner of the immanent order necessary to the cosmos. However, it was the ancient Hellenic poetry and epics, which combined religious and philosophical components in their stories, that made possible a process of differentiation between religion and philosophy. Culturally, the process of differentiation between religion and philosophy eventually laid the foundations for Western philosophy to develop a framework for secular culture.

- The traditional university system in Western culture differentiates between religion/philosophy and modern science. The institutionalization of intellectual thought, (i.e., the founding of universities), in Western culture eventually produced both pure scholars and techno-digitally minded scientists. Contemporary philosophers, (not necessarily confined to universities), formulate differentiation and create plurality in philosophical thought through directing the evolutionary process. Thus, a variety of philosophies is manifest in the world at any one time. They are of widely varying perspectives and are in differing degrees of agreement with each other.

8. *The Varieties of Contemporary Philosophy and Social Evolution*

- Contemporary philosophical perspectives are the product of an evolutionary process of ideas within the human context. As an evolutionary product, contemporary philosophy cannot form a stable component within human society. The evolutionary stages of philosophical ideas extend from the early history of Western thought, through to the Middle Ages, through to modern, contemporary and posthuman thought. Traditional Western philosophers are showing signs intellectual stagnation in their present evolution of thought. Recall that contemporary philosophers are those I identify as questioning the classical philosophy of academia as adequate in light of their personal intellectual need. A philosophical study of the development of individual human consciousness reveals a parallel pattern in the collective human consciousness. Prior to *informed* human speculation everything in the West was philosophy, except philosophy itself, as we are conscious of it today. That is to say, all philosophy was perceived as physical (i.e., real), and experienced through myth and folklore, before it became distinguished as ideal (i.e., metaphysical).

- When the authority of the founders of the intellectual life, or philosophy as it is envisioned, is rejected their ideas often become the source of discord instead of harmony. Discordant ideas with no authority to unite them do not foster the development of any common idea. Historically, discordant ideas signify the first stage of stagnation of classical philosophy in that discord prevents the evolution from particular philosophical speculation to a universal perspective, i.e., unity. Discordant ideas evolve into fragmentation without conscious human intervention. In principle, collective external unity follows upon individual internal unity.
- Philosophers have the function of directing human speculation within religious belief. It is impossible, in an age of antiquity without date, to determine when human intellectual activity began. However, at a certain stage in the Western understanding of theological activity, theologians themselves actually contributed to the stagnation of philosophy. Theologians supplied “divine grace” as the answer to questions for which philosophers had no natural, or “scientific” answers. As a result, in the West, philosophers who were mostly believing Christians, accepted this stopgap measure and their thinking ceased to evolve. Their thinking resumed evolving when they realized they no longer needed divine assistance to interpret the cosmos.
- Contemporary philosophers have freed themselves from much theological interference and have understood the cosmos as existing independently of divine grace. This freedom from theological dogmatism has been attained through the intervention of the scientific method of interpretation. However, what seems to be overlooked is that the dynamic “will” of God has been replaced by the static “laws” of nature accepted within the scientific spirit of inquiry. The cosmos is no longer enchanted and alive, but only inert and obtains its movement and purpose from innate chemical relationships. In short, the laws of nature came to function as the will of God. The methods of modern science, through the course of its evolution, critically modified and adapted both philosophical and theological conceptions such that the same rules that governed the thinking of the ancient Greeks and Romans can never adequately govern human conceptual thinking again. This is so because intellectual activity is perpetually evolving, under human direction, from a simple to a complex function of interpretation.

9. *Philosophical Values from the Western Perspective of Interpretation*

- Human society is a reflection of the variety of human personalities. For philosophers, the political interest in the collective history of a society, or association, eventually shifts to the personal history of

individuals. Philosophers balance the interpretation of obligations and gratifications on the part of the individual thus establishing a harmonious development of the personality. Philosophy, like religion, is abstract, normative, and emotional, but not reducible to any one of these factors. Positive philosophical principles, which are self-evident, have an inherent claim upon individual consciences which ultimately generates an attitude of mutual respect of which psychology is incapable. The goal of philosophical authority is to establish attitudes of positive value within politically and socially constituted collectivities. Yet, an incorrect attitude in much contemporary Western philosophy is to preserve the past and re-create it in the present. This is not a positive attitude for human advancement, but is dangerously pathological attitude potentially retarding human advancement. It is through culture, as a fluid social reality, that the understanding and development of the personality of the human being occurs. In the mind of contemporary philosophers, unlike that of many contemporary psychologists, history resembles itself; it does not repeat itself.

- Philosophical values arise within a perceptual frame of reference in which the meaning assigned to an experience by the philosopher-agent is influenced by the environment in which the experience occurs. Positively determined philosophical values have a role to play in the management of the psychological tension within the person. (In a word, psychology is a necessary quality, even though negative, of higher life forms. Philosophy is an optional activity of the human intellect.) Positively determined values introduce harmony into the person's life by overcoming the isolation of one individual from another due to differing cultural expectations and by reducing ignorance and conflict in the life of each. Contemporary philosophers (and posthuman philosophers) are beginning to leave the classical repose of the ivory tower supported by the Western tradition and enter the existential ranks of a wider uncharted philosophical community. Thus, both the adventurous individual and the non-traditional philosophical community acquire an increased capacity for progressive intellectual development.
- The answers to problems of meaning given by philosophers have consequences for cultural advancement or lack of it. The essence of all philosophy is societal. Contemporary philosophy, as opposed to classical philosophy, becomes a prerogative of the thinker living in a multicultural context. My contemporary human personality constitutes a social and linguistic "me" made up of my particular environmental characteristics who is confronted by another human organism made up its unique social and linguistic environmental characteristics and appearing as another "me." The multicultural

environment supplies the option for a variety of experiences by which contemporary philosophical values can be decided upon individually and collectively.

- With the advent of *Renaissance* humanism philosophical values no longer needed to appear in the guise of religious values reflecting a moral philosophical conscience. A personal moral conscience no longer required theological support which is to say that humans no longer needed to cultivate a religious personality in order to be moral beings, the classical point of view which distinguished them from brute animals. Which is to say that one's human status is not bestowed by any religious authority. Through modern science a treasury of knowledge is transferred to each new generation that did not gather it for itself. Allowing for evolutionary innovations, then, each generation speaks a language it did not create, it uses instruments it did not invent, and invokes rights it did not found, etc. It is to this inherited treasury that contemporary philosophers assign meaning in light of the innovative modifications that evolved from contemporary experience.
- The intellectual ability of many contemporary philosophers is such that they are capable of entering into the philosophical values of other personalities. They are capable of understanding another's meanings, individually and collectively. Further, this capacity gives rise to individuals who can evaluate the treasury of scientific knowledge and assign it an alternative meaning in light of their experience. Such meaning then becomes objectively available to others. Many contemporary philosophers neither affirm nor deny that there is a fundamental purpose (or mind) that directs the development of all nature. They are, in fact, agnostic. ⁶
- By the "self" contemporary Western philosophers mean that which is designated by the English pronouns of the first person singular, i.e., I, me, my, mine, myself. The self is the self-conscious act of appropriation by the human organism of itself that continually evolves through experience. Alternatively expressed, my self is my affective being. Contemporary philosophers conceive of three types of

⁶ Leslie Dewart's testimony is instructive here. "For, being a plain, though modern Christian (that is, a Christian who does not believe that to be Christian one must also think as a Greek, and one who believes instead that the only sensible way to be Christian is to admit the reality of the present day), I am disinclined to believe in the hidden power of the immanent divinities which, as Thales thought, all things are full of. Belief in the Christian God implies, so far as I am concerned, a positive disbelief in Fate: necessity be damned, for all I care. I refuse — let me make the religious nature of this act of un-faith clear, I refuse — until, if ever, I should be shown otherwise, to believe the primitive superstitions that there are implicit necessities within being, that being has, as its very reality, an inner warrant to command assent, and that invisible predeterminations constitute it and make it definable as that which has an antecedent call on the intellect." *Religion, Language and Truth* (1970:162) Herder & Herder.

personality; closed, open, and creative. A closed philosophical personality has attained a great fixity of belief thus appearing to be fully formed. An open philosophical personality continues to evolve retaining the appearance of a human being in the process of being formed. The creative philosophical personality exemplifies the best of these two types. That is to say its personal identity is sufficiently “fixed,” and yet it is dynamic enough to continue to form itself by directing its own evolution. The function of personal identity is creative, not repetitive.

- In the process of directed evolution, a philosophical personality becomes more and more specifically identified, and yet its identity is not determined in advance. Further, the creative philosopher seeks to heighten and deepen the evolutionary understanding of the interpretation of personal experience. Contemporary creative philosophers are not conventional. That is to say, they have no mainstream presence but are, in fact, a fringe presence in Western society. Their philosophy, being a conscious part of their personality, requires them to live often as strangers within their social environment (frequently a strange land). This isolation may account for their lack of recognition by classical philosophers.

10. *Philosophical Creativity and Culture*

- Culture is a living system of creative philosophical activity determined by assigning a relational meaning to human experience. Relational meaning is assigned by agents within their environments which means that relational meaning is not inherent in the environment. The highest human level of the assignment of meaning is the conception of metaphysical reality as a product of the mind, Physical reality is accessible only through the senses, or an artificial extension of the senses, whereas, metaphysical reality is accessible only via speculation and symbolization. Philosophical innovations are at the level of symbolic meaning, i.e., an ideology. The physical, or political, result is often a diversity and multiplicity of cultural manifestations. These manifestations suggest that evolutionary creativity is not moving toward an ultimate union or unity. Contemporary philosophers encounter foreign cultures that reveal that our Western philosophical perspective, which we believe to be founded on universal human nature, is actually an expression of a particular interpretation of cultural experience and is therefore subject to modification and revision. Thus, many philosophers mistakenly engage in contemplating ideals and values common within humanity hoping to discover the universal nature of humanity. The varieties of human cultures are the result of their cumulative historical pasts. But the causes of human cultures within history are difficult to identify and isolate and subsequently to interpret philosophically. However,

culture itself appears to be linked to philosophical creativity as the urge and spark common to human life. From an historical perspective, the dominance of the biological evolutionary process has passed from the individual organism within a species to the recognition of the philosophical evolutionary process of individual human beings within particular cultures.

- In the cultural orders (of the Orient and the Occident) phenomenological events are interpreted as defining human development. But phenomenological events are not reserved to presentation by modern science or techno-digital ideologies. Phenomenological events also occur within the evolution of philosophy. The abuse or distortion of philosophy (or religion) for partisan political and doctrinaire purposes by unscrupulous propagandists is a pathological intervention within the evolution of philosophical culture. An acceptance of this pathological stance is, in fact, an indication of the stagnation of philosophy which, in turn, retards the positive evolution of culture. In the West, philosophers have created critical intellectual communities out of the folk traditions of the past. When philosophers became professional, as opposed to amateur, they also created the ethic of humanitarianism transcending, or in some cases, replacing the various moral relationships of folk religion. Humanitarianism introduced the modern notion of *homo politicus* recognized as a global phenomenon. The development of intellectualism within the *homo politicus* has further increased the opportunities for philosophical creativity of the *homo politicus* in contemporary culture. In short, politicians would do well to brush up on their philosophy.

- The opportunity for philosophical creativity not only includes the selecting of cultural values, but also includes the opportunity for the determination of cultural values. Philosophers emancipate themselves from a fixed cycle of natural life through an examination and interpretation of culture. It is the creative philosopher who conceives the world as lacking meaning for humanity and subsequently meaning must be assigned accordingly. Philosophical creativity operates symbolically as a function of the human mind. The symbols that are produced are metaphysical objects for human contemplation. However, they are abstract images of produced by the intellect that cannot be physically encountered. Creative philosophical symbols are interpreted metaphorically and vary according to one's cultural experience. Culture is a collective term for the existential and normative patterns of behaviour. Cultural patterns of behaviour change at the direction of human agents. At the heart of contemporary philosophical creativity there is an opportunity for individual and collective transformation in understanding. However, contemporary philosophers cannot revoke the past, nor can they close the

future. All the components of a present culture do not change at the same time, despite intentional human intervention. This accounts for the confusion and tension of identity within a culture. Confusion and tension are caused by the readjustments that occur as a result of creative philosophical thinking.

- A civilized cosmos would be the epitome of humanity's creative philosophical enlightenment. That is to say that necessity, as classically understood, does not factor into determining the civilized cosmos as the ancient Hellenists thought. All past events could have been otherwise. Philosophical creativity results in a judgment of value, not a judgment of fact, which is to say that contemporary philosophers do not seek a conformity to conventional knowledge, but a fidelity to wisdom as opposed to ignorance. In other words, they do not seek the stability of being (an ancient Hellenistic epistemological legacy) but they seek the dynamic creativity of contemporary philosophical evolution. A subjective task of contemporary philosophers is to remove the intellectual obstacles to personal creativity and thus free themselves from the static character of the conformist, enabling the ongoing development of a creative personality. Professional philosophers possess no charismatic or unique authority when exercising their creativity. They are part of a social grouping that exhibits a gifted relationship within their particular culture. Philosophical creativity, as opposed to philosophical normality, can only be "awakened" in an individual consciousness. Philosophical creativity cannot be "learned" or "taught" as a formal discipline introduced into the mind as if the mind were a *tabula rasa*. Although, in Western universities certain professors often present philosophical normality as "creative" philosophy, but they are merely venturing into variations on a theme. However, philosophical creativity does have its limits. It cannot be extended beyond the sensible culture of the philosopher without becoming fictional, mythological or unverifiable poetics. Philosophical creativity must remain in the realm of experience.

- The evolutionary process discloses a sense of, or an understanding of, the nature of a person. That is to say, within the evolutionary process creative philosophy assists many individuals in knowing themselves. Contemporary philosophers often conceive the individual human being as a *universal type* of organism. Unlike classical philosophers, who attach universality to an abstract idea transcending the individual, contemporary philosophers recognize universality as the innate quality of consciousness of the human being, regardless of location and circumstances. This understanding is accompanied by the capacity of human beings to fashion and adapt their immediate environment to their needs. As well, where humans exist this quality of universal consciousness is recognized individually and collectively

by other human beings making universal consciousness a human characteristic, not a philosophical abstract. All phenomena are interpreted consciously by human beings, but not all human beings are conscious philosophers.

- Contemporary philosophers attempt to understand their culture and its influences upon their thinking. However, most individuals in any given culture rarely engage in sufficient self-reflection. They are unaware that their culture has both an effect and an affect upon them. The attitudes and values of a culture have roots deep below the individual consciousness of the average member of society. Uncritical thinkers are in danger of succumbing to a phenomenon known as “faddism,” (i.e., lacking philosophical creativity) which is often expressed in the social media as “trending.” That is to say, new elements of culture can be added and readily accepted by certain individuals with no discernible philosophical justification for accepting these elements (i.e., the pop culture phenomena). *Tout le monde le fait, allons-y.*

11. *The Task of Contemporary Western Philosophers*

- Western philosophy, as it is undertaken in the contemporary context, is primarily an academic discipline due to its development within the universities. When philosophy became a subject of the modern university syllabus, philosophers lost much of their creative impetus and insight. Philosophy as a profession, in fact, has stagnated to a great degree. The Western academic mind does not tolerate philosophical innovation and cultural diversity well as is evident within Western politics. The Western philosophical mind seeks a union or unity of experience through a coherent body of interpretations. The failure at union or unity, paradoxically, causes mental disarray, and contemporary philosophers are motivated to forsake the ideology of the tribe, the ideology of political classes, and the ideology of the church, etc. and set out on their own project to re-chart the known universe philosophically.
- Contemporary philosophers disclose relationships that reflect the composition of current global culture. Contemporary global culture is made up of various societies, many of which appreciate the individual as a moral personality, although interpreted primarily from a Western perspective. Heterogeneity as a cultural fact, not union or unity, is the discovery of a philosophical creative interpretation. The mental effort to discover general principles or laws from observation and experience based on a cultural tradition is an acceptable description of classical philosophy. Classical philosophy emphasizes the objective character of human thinking. Contemporary philosophy, however, emphasizes

the subjective character of interpretation. The *virtuosi* of contemporary philosophy, respecting the historical reality of human experience, do not consider their efforts as exhaustive or conclusive. They attempt a deeper and more accurate articulation of experience and usually do not express their thoughts disjunctively. Contemporary Western philosophers are existential philosophers because they are persons reflecting upon their lived experience. They do not simply traffic in static ideas or data. Such traffic in static ideas or data is more properly characteristic of classical philosophy, of non-interpretive modern pseudo-science, of Artificial Intelligence and not characteristic of creative philosophy. Contemporary philosophers work outside classically determined categories and as they become specialized will become increasingly marginal within classical culture. Readers desiring to think more deeply about AI would do well to begin with a quote by Leslie Dewart.⁷

- Philosophy, as a subject of human attention, is a continuing elaboration of an individual's intellectual effort to understand itself and its culture. Contemporary philosophers by intervening in the evolution of self-interpretation go beyond the classical philosophers and their interpretation. Thus, contemporary philosophy presents a perspective that extends beyond the individual life-span and the

⁷ "The invention of the computer, and in particular of computers having what is misleadingly called 'artificial intelligence' ... may be deemed a close parallel of the invention of phonetic writing not least of all because it may prove to be the cause of cultural changes comparable in magnitude only to the Sumerian innovation. It is already possible – though with limitations that are certain to be overcome before long – to build computers that (to put it loosely) understand spoken instructions and reply in kind, that can translate from one human language to another, that exercise judgment on the basis of previous experience (for instance, they offer medical diagnoses and prescribe medical procedures), and that seem to think and reason in ways that are distinguishable from the human process only in being more reliable and exceedingly faster. Of course, a computer that takes verbal instructions and responds with intelligible vocal sounds – either in the same or in another language – discoursing on, say, medical subjects, no more *understands* speech or medicine than a typewriter *thinks* and then *communicates* its medical wisdom by typing out a medical textbook. It is the human beings who use it, and who interact by means of it, that alone *perform* these activities, the computer could be attributed 'artificial intelligence' only in the same metaphorical sense in which levers might be ascribed 'artificial muscle power.' Thus, using a computer that has been appropriately programmed to lend him the skills of human medical experts, a person can produce results that surpass what he could do on his own – the very thing that a medical textbook can help him to do, though on a much smaller scale.

But many people are unclear about the difference between the activity and the contents of thought; they therefore assume that "artificial intelligence" is possible, and are inspired to create it. My point is that their not knowing better facilitates their success. For instance, they analyse human speech and thought in order to recreate these processes electronically in computers. Now, if they took into account the assertiveness of speech and thought, they would realize that the threshold requirement for producing these is some sort of self-oriented causal process – in other words, the purposiveness that is found only in living entities – and would therefore deem impossible the creation of a machine with artificial intelligence. Their unawareness of this impossibility, however, holds a paradoxical advantage: speech and thought as they mistakenly conceive them are the kind that *can* be electronically reproduced. In the end they do not, to be sure, create a true counterpart of the human processes; but what they actually achieve is a marvel none the less, and multiplies immeasurably the power of human beings to bring about change. Now, *why* should "artificial intelligence" be created? And for what *ends* should it be used once created? These questions are not likely to be adequately answered either by scientists who are so confused about themselves that they conceive the idea of creating it, nor by the equally perplexed, eager consumers of scientific technology who defer to them." Leslie Dewart (1922-2009) *Evolution and Consciousness: The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature* (1969:307) University of Toronto Press [Dewart's italics].

experiences of particular individuals. Contemporary philosophers acknowledge humanity's quest for some type of order (hierarchical or nodal) in the universe which is not characteristic of brute animal life. Whether this order is abstracted from the cosmos itself, or assigned to the universe by humans from their philosophical insight, such a quest distinguishes human beings from non-human living beings. Humans enjoy a unique dignity inherent in philosophical achievement. That is to say opinion becomes enlightened truth,⁸ collective self-knowledge is furthered, and self-transformation is more readily achieved. A justification for contemporary philosophy as a discipline is that it advances the understandings that human beings can acquire in the course of an intelligent engagement with a life of culture. As part of the intellectual life in the West, philosophy must remain distinct from theology. It cannot *replace* any interpretation of natural law based on a religious perspective, but rather *justifies* a religious perspective as its base.

- Contemporary philosophy is becoming one of the broader intellectual interests within Western evolutionary culture. However, this is happening disproportionately as philosophy becomes appreciated by an increasingly larger portion of an educated population who orientate themselves to a higher culture outside the confines of historically established universities that continue to restrict studies to traditional academic disciplines and perspectives in the humanities. The sciences appear to be the favoured disciplines within many current Western universities. As contemporary philosophy gains influence within an educated public, although in their infancy, as it were, contemporary philosophers are seeking to “unveil” base motives within existing cultures and discredit the proponents of such negative cultures. Exposure to the “true cause of things,” that is to say the philosophically investigative activity of an agent, reveals the structure of relationships and interpretations at the human level that need change. Contemporary Western philosophers are not restricted to the values and inheritance of the Age of Enlightenment. Due to the evolutionary progress of academia contemporary professional philosophers are better informed because of the great variety of disciplines available for contemplation. Also, because of globalization, Western philosophical ideas are reciprocated by a greater number of non-Western philosophical perspectives. Thus, contemporary philosophers will need to contemplate existentially the evolution of digital-technology and its effect globally. Such as an extended life span, and unforeseen variants to the already established patterns of life, are bound to arise. Without being “custodians of the

⁸ In my perspective, truth is not fact itself. Truth is an activity of one's consciousness as it abides by the facts. Truth is the qualitative experience of each individual.

past” contemporary Western philosophers must become “architects of the future” as they learn from their philosophical ancestors who themselves did not think in a void.

Chapter Two

PLEASE, LET ME BE AN ATHEIST

The Creed makes of religious truth a political fiction.

Introduction

My comments on the Creed arise as reflections from a Christian philosopher, not theologian. I might be classified as a theological philosopher in this regard. The Creed is not a testimony to charismatic belief although charismatic belief is at its origins. The Creed as recited today in most hierarchical churches is an ideal of ecclesiastical stability. I do not contest that the Constantinian organization that stabilized early charismatic belief had the authority to do so in the circumstances of the time. In this critique I do not take into account the historical reasons for the stabilization of the charismatic order of the early church, but I reflect only on the meaning of the clauses of the Creed as they are recited by the faithful today. As they stand today, the clauses require a contemporary philosophical re-investigation of the theological issues defined in the Creed. The main question guiding this critique is: Do changes in the philosophical perspective underpinning the theological statements make changes in the theological meaning of the clauses? To inquire into this question, I undertake a critique of each clause in light of a contemporary philosophical reflection from the point of the first-person singular, that is, “I believe,” and leave aside any correlation on what the faithful, as a like-minded community, may choose to believe. That is to say, the question of what the “Church” teaches and what I believe is not addressed here. Without question, I have changed my mind and shifted my understanding many times as I directed the evolution of my philosophical speculations over the years. This chapter is the result of that evolutionary process to date. In accounting for my belief, I avoid citing other academics as authorities, not for lack of deference to their point of view, but rather to highlight more clearly the ideas or notions that they have put forward. I encourage the reader to assess the philosophical value of the ideas presented, rather than consider the reputation of the philosopher. This requires a degree of psychic maturity on the part of the reader to reflect upon his or her experience and acknowledge any similarity or dissimilarity with other interpreters.

I consciously adopt an “atheistic” attitude in this interpretation of the Christian Creed. By that I mean I am an atheist with respect to the formulae for the Creed, not its content. The philosophical formulation

is not to be equated with the the Creed's theological content. I do not deny God, but rather I deny the adequacy of the formulae to satisfactorily express the belief of the critical philosopher. I affirm the need to reformulate the cultural images and linguistic concepts that have been used to describe God in the Western philosophical tradition.⁹ I question that the Creed is an *obligatory* expression of the Christian faith. My desire here is to be intellectually free from an authoritatively (politically) imposed obligation to accept the Creed's meaning and purpose as originally defined by the Council of Nicaea which was convened by the Emperor Constantine the Great. I suggest that for many contemporary Christians the Creed reflects a belief system that is confined to the standards of philosophical inquiry prevalent in a former time. What was lacking at that time, as I read history, and what Vatican II introduced, was freedom of personal conscience. Freedom of personal conscience is a positive notion that, in fact, affirms the option "not to believe."¹⁰

In accepting the Creed as an expression of philosophy, not faith, I question whether or not the classical philosophical foundation is sufficiently persuasive to convince me to accept it as an adequate support for my present faith stance. "Do the principles and concepts of classical philosophy satisfactorily support my faith," is the question that I explore. In light of my philosophical studies on the credal formulation I question whether the inherited formulation is a *necessary* one for my personal belief. Could the formulae have been stated otherwise and thus not be necessary, but rather contingent on the circumstances of the time? This raises two further questions in my mind: Is acceptance of the Creed, as currently formulated, necessary for Christian belief in God? In short, is a Creedless, or Godless, Christianity possible?¹¹

⁹ I am not the first to mention this. In 1969, Gregory Baum wrote: "Ultimately the re-interpretation of doctrine in the light of the new focus [about what happens to people everywhere] will have to be applied to the doctrine of God. Is it possible to speak about God and his transcendence in a manner that is in harmony with the contemporary experience of reality? In another study I hope to show that the refocusing of the Gospel that took place at Vatican II enables us to re-think the problem of God and to speak of God and the entire content of his revelation in terms taken from the significant conflicts of contemporary life and in a language that is proper to our day." *Faith and Doctrine: A Contemporary View* (1969:8) Paulist Press.

¹⁰ What used to be spoken of as *freedom of conscience* shortly after the Council is now spoken of as *religious freedom*. The Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, Laurence Ryan, (1987-2003) translated this relevant passage from *Dignitatis Humanae* in Austin Flannery's *Vatican Council II* (1995:557-58). "...it is wrong for a public authority to compel its citizens by force of fear or any other means to profess or repudiate any religion or to prevent anyone from joining or leaving a religious body. ... People nowadays are subjected to a variety pressures and run the risk of being prevented from acting in accordance with their own free judgment."

¹¹ For a contemporary cultural insight into these questions in light of what the Creed affirms, the philosophically minded reader might undertake reading current obituary columns and ask: How many deceased have a religious service? How many have no service? How many have a secular service that implies no belief in God or an afterlife? How many celebrate the life of the deceased with reference only to its past? How many have a social gathering? How many have no gathering whatsoever? And so on.

An understanding of personal agency is primary in this chapter. From a philosophical perspective, I hold that history unfolds through the interaction of agents and actors. Agents initiate action and living actors respond, as opposed to react, to the initial action of the agent. In human affairs, most agency is an ethical activity, and a moral activity for those who believe in the Christian God. Agency is not merely a cause that brings about change without ethical or moral consequences. In short, an agent is a human being to whom others respond, partly as passive actors, or respond as other active agents. In many existential exchanges, humans switch roles, actors becoming agents and vice versa. For the purposes of this philosophical essay I, as an agent, question the moral obligation that I must accept the Creed, on the authority of the Church, as adequate for my salvation in light of my freedom of conscience. And also, if it is adequate for my salvation, is it also compulsory for my faith?

From my philosophical perspective, I hold that artists and poets (excluding philosophers) act *as if* they might be lesser gods, as it were, when *fashioning* their existential world according to their own *imagination*. Adventurous philosophers, on the other hand, act *as if* they are lesser gods, as it were, by *re-creating* the world after their own *being*, i.e., a world re-created to suit their own being. This difference becomes highly significant when I come to interpret the clauses in the Creed. Artists and poets are confined to a finite and an imaginary world of ideas when practicing their craft. Philosophers, however, are not confined to a finite and imaginary world of ideas. Their reflection transcends the finite cognitive and metaphysical understanding of reality. That is to say they, in fact, *interpret* real relationships by assigning meaning to their essence, rather than merely *express* relationships alternatively by revealing a different perspective of their essence. One might say that artists and poets speak of reality through a metaphorical language. Whereas, philosophers speak a real language of contemporary relationships through existential wisdom, not through a techno-digital scientific knowledge.

Many philosophers over the years have noted the influence of ancient Hellenic philosophy, particularly Platonism in the formation of early Christian theology. I am not attempting to justify Greek Platonism in the Creed as a suitable universal philosophical foundation. However, the ideas that I present in my interpretation are not new. I do, however, exploit the legacy of notable and revered authorities in articulating my beliefs although I do not necessarily and overtly acknowledge their specific contribution to my thinking. The seasoned philosopher will appreciate my approach more than the neophyte, I am

sure, and will most likely recognize those authorities who preceded me. In fact, the neophyte philosopher might become somewhat destabilized in his or her own belief system without the stabilizing presence of authorities. I appeal to experience to justify my dissenting philosophical stance over a community consensus purporting to be normative. I ask: What options, with respect to philosophical belief, do I have within the clauses of the Creed? Reflecting on my religious experience has brought me to the realization that I am not a theist with respect to the existence of *other* gods. As well, I am an atheist with respect to my inherited and current *understanding* of the universal Christian God. That is to say that I am in the process of recasting my understanding. Thus, my atheism pertains to the conception of God, not the reality of God. I am not an agnostic since I assign (or project, if you prefer) my own philosophical conception of an unblemished human self as God. Considered as reality, or fiction, my unblemished human self, projected as God, is the image of the person I would like to become. In short, one might argue that I have created my own *creed of life*. The traditional Western concept of God defines the essence of God's being as without physical substance. This concept, in fact, at one time satisfied my metaphysical understanding of divinity. The question that I am actually raising now is one not often contemplated by traditional philosophers. "Is the Creed a Christian product in Greek dress or a Greek product in Christian dress?" A philosophical reflection on the Nicene Creed may disclosed an answer for critically educated thinker. The Creed, as a theological conviction of belief, shows no political nor military influence, but that was not likely the case with Constantine who convened the council at Nicaea. (The interested reader may want to undertake an historical investigation on this point.) Today, as I see it, one's credal conviction arises from a personal "inner need" which is more intense in intellectuals and academics than in political or military forces. The exception being, of course, were the Creed become a threat to the modern state.

The Nicene Creed ¹²

*I [We] believe in one God,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the Only Begotten Son of God,
born of the Father before all ages.
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,
and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,
he suffered death and was buried,
and rose again on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures.
He ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead
and his kingdom will have no end.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father [and the Son],
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,
who has spoken through the prophets.
I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.*

Commentary

1. *I believe in one God,*

“believe”

What is it to believe, I wonder? Philosophically, I am told that most Western thinkers would define belief as the acquiescence in the existence of something without discriminating between it as a physical or a mental object. My belief in a physical object becomes knowledge through sense experience of its spatial characteristics which are bodily-dependent. My belief in a mental object, such as a proposition, rests on

¹² I follow the Latin singular, although Greek versions follow the first-person plural.

reflection and inference since propositions and principles have no spatial characteristics but are notions of the mind. My belief in propositions and principles is manifest through three distinct psychic qualities: an affective quality, an intellectual quality and a volitional quality.¹³ I do not believe in as God having any spatial characteristics, nor as a social being, but only as a proposition of my psychic inference functioning philosophically through my affectivity, my intelligibility, and my will to believe.

Many philosophers do not distinguish between faith and opinion. Faith, being the acceptance of ideals despite the fact that they cannot be demonstrated, differs from opinion in that opinion rests on rational grounds, yet can be doubted since it may lack evidence. Evidence is not required in either a statement of faith, i.e., the Creed, or opinion. Many traditional Christian philosophers have no difficulty in accepting that faith requires a supernatural intervention on God's part that amounts to grace. Grace is a person's ability to grasp truth without contradiction, and to grasp propositions and principles that are beyond human reason, as a gift of God. I cannot demonstrate my belief in God's existence. Perhaps, however, I can accept my belief in God's present *presence* as not being identical to God's objective existence. Since my faith remains positive reasonable, (I do not fashion negative and unreasonable entities), it is not necessary that its object, i.e., God, must exist in any spatial form. A propositional form for my faith in God suffices. I hold that God, as presence, is not a being in the Aristotelian philosophical sense. Thus, God may "be," but God does not exist, for I do not equate being and existence. For God, "to be" does not mean to be some "thing" that exists. Once this proposition is clearly understood one can reasonably believe that God does not need to exist as traditionally understood. Alternatives to the philosophical understanding God's *being* are possible.

"one God"

If I reasonably believe that God does not exist as a being, but is present to me affectively, why is the numerical qualification of "one" required? As intended here "one" is a philosophical justification that metaphysical being is characterized by unity, not plurality. However, the evolutionary process within human experience is moving away from unity to plurality, from uniformity to diversity. The dominant philosophical perspective is that metaphysical unity precedes individuated (separated) existence. Existence is plurality, not unity. This then accounts for the Creed, with an eye to classical metaphysics,

¹³ The term psychic describes any mental quality of a living organism, whereas, the term psychological describes the science of the mind, its function, structure and behaviour.

insisting on one non-existent God and not many non-existent gods. Is “one” a numerical concept and hence a characteristic for God, or is “one” meant to suggest something else? I hold, that it means something else. From a philosophical perspective the concept of the unity of God is a projection of a necessary “inner harmony” of the human being. For humans, personal harmony within themselves and with their environment is necessary. God’s unity is thus envisioned as a transcendental (metaphysical) reality in contrast to the multiplicity of physical human experience in its manifold expressions. But, from a philosophical perspective, is it necessary to believe in the singularity and uniqueness of God as classically understood? I think not. In an attempt achieve their “personal inner harmony” in this life many contemporary philosophers accept the plurality of God’s nature as a reflection of themselves in whose image God has been fashioned. For them the reverse is true: God has been created in humanity’s image, not vice versa. This view, to them, more accurately reflects and conforms to their experience, which I think is worth considering in light of the Creed’s philosophical formulation.

2. *the Father almighty,*

“Father”

Why this personal term based on the pattern of Hebrew familial relationships? Is it simply because Jesus instructed the use of the term in his teachings? If so, this is a poor philosophical reason, I suggest. The contemporary understanding of some the term in the West has acquired negative connotations in the experience of the faithful due to widely experienced and reported abuse in family relationships. There is no necessity to conceive God as personal from my philosophical perspective. The Genesis account of human creation notwithstanding, God may be philosophically conceived otherwise than as an agent in perfected human dress. Evidence of this non-human perspective is available in many non-Christian and non-Western cultures. (To me, this suggests that there is a need for a greater number of alternative conceptions in understanding the clauses of the Creed.) Further, in relation to “Father,” contemporary gender studies have highlighted the problematic of the traditional understanding of the Western family in light of present-day familial social constructions. Is it possible to conceive the agency of God as neutral, non-personal, yet adequately fulfilling the inner needs of the contemporary Christian? I think not. In Christianity, unless unhealthy, an agency can only initiate activity in its own self-interest. Positive agency does not allow for any negativity. In Christian tradition negativity is attributed to another agent, mistakenly identified as an evil entity, i.e., the devil. Evil, from my philosophical perspective, has no being in itself however; it is merely a degree of the absence of the good.

“almighty”

Whence comes the notion of understanding God as almighty? Is it necessary? Must God be attributed unlimited power patterned after the agency of human powers, and specifically that of the ancient Greeks? This, it seems to me, is the legacy of an ancient belief that is contrary to contemporary experience. The history of the Judeo-Christian experience clearly shows that God has not “almightily” intervened in human affairs. To invite, and at the same time to excuse, the lack of God’s almighty intervention into imperfect human affairs is a poor reflection on God’s concern for the world. According to John’s gospel, sending Jesus is the best God could do.¹⁴ Further, God’s all-powerful status subordinates and impedes human responsibility and maturity in this life thereby keeping humanity in a subservient relationship. Rather than conceive of a feudal-type relationship between God and humanity, I prefer to think that humanity’s ideal of God ought to inspire humans to consciously improve themselves. As I mature in life my self-understanding and understanding of God change. I leave my past understanding behind my insights into my self-understanding and relationship with God continue to evolve. Thus, my inherited sense of subordination to God fades into the background as I take more responsibility for my own decisions. In short, almighty God is not responsible for everything anymore.

3. *maker of heaven and earth,*

“maker”

My philosophical inheritance is that the universe had a logical beginning with God as the cause. Does this principle survive contemporary philosophical scrutiny? Perhaps an alternative speculative understanding is correct. God does not pre-exist the universe as creator. God and the universe are coterminous, that is, neither precedes the other. God, as an agent creator is, but a concept of human philosophical speculation. Historically, Judeo-Christian revelation has provided, to one’s question of the beginning of the cosmos, the answer that God was present beforehand in order to fashion the cosmos from chaos. From a philosophical perspective, why does the cosmos have to be made or created; could it not always have existed? No one knows for certain if the beginning was chaos or cosmos. The genesis of the cosmos, either fashioned out of pre-existing chaos, or by the imposition of an *ex nihilo* order, is an inheritance of a non-critical Christian faith perspective. It is not philosophy. An early challenge to this uncritical faith stance was posed by critical thinkers through ancient Hellenic philosophy. The use

¹⁴ John 3:16.

of reason inherent in Hellenic philosophy, in fact, initially supported the perspective of the Christian faith. However, in the contemporary philosophical context the use of reason raises more questions than it solves. Chaos was always there. Or better, chaos is inherent in humanity which lacks harmony in itself, who then consciously projected the need for order as God within the human environment. Given that God is the “maker” of the cosmos, who then made the pre-existing chaos that God fashioned into the cosmos? Does this suggest that there is a “god” that preceded the God of Judeo-Christian revelation? Further, in my philosophical perspective, I distinguish between the action of a maker of things and the activity of a creator of things. The latter’s activity which is *ex nihilo* requires “no thing” but the former’s action requires “some thing” upon which to act. Does either concept require an agency in a phenomenological reality of relationships? I doubt that this can ever be definitively decided philosophically. It is a matter of personal choice and either satisfies the believer or it does not. Why must whatever God made be in the totality of all that there is, i.e., heaven and earth and beyond? Clearly, the answer is that the Creed is preserving an ultimate value that has been derived from a philosophical perspective dominant prior to modernity and the techno-digital understanding of the human experience, that is, all being is made by God.

4. *of all things visible and invisible.*

“of all things”

Again, could there be things not of God’s creation? It seems not. According to the Creed which reinforces the theological need for the Christian God to be the unique source of whatever and all that exists.

“visible and invisible”

To my mind this qualification continues the need to reinforce the human desire to understand God as an all-inclusive agent. What is invisible to humanity is deemed visible to God and thus is accounted for in God’s activity of creation from a Christian theological perspective. But can this faith perspective be justified within contemporary philosophy? Human intellectual incapacity, that is, human ignorance of knowledge solely reserved to God, is intentionally forbidden to humanity as the Genesis story relates. In light of contemporary experience, I doubt that this understanding can continue to be supported as an adequate philosophical conviction among many contemporary Western philosophers. Although it may satisfy many of the uncritical faithful whose consciousness remains immature and underdeveloped.

5. *I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,*

Here the agency of Jesus is introduced. In an age of democracy why retain “Lord,” unless it is meant merely to be understood as metaphor? Why continue to identify Jesus exclusively as fulfilling this monarchical role? He actually fled from the kingly role being forced upon him if scripture is to be believed.¹⁵ My philosophical perspective is that “Lord” need not be the exclusive term expressing any relationship with the son of God. A democratic or non-feudal designation, such as “master” or “elder” in the sense of one imparting wisdom can serve equally well. The ancient terminology of “Lord” does not accurately describe my understanding or express my current relationship with Jesus of Nazareth. In short, my relationship is not conceived as one of Lord and vassal, but rather as one of master and disciple. Viewed from a political perspective I remain somewhat amazed that America, as a nation, lives a bipolar political life: civilly as a democracy and ecclesiastically as a monarchy.

6. *the Only Begotten Son of God,*

Why this exclusivity of only one begotten son? Perhaps there are, in fact, others who are left unacknowledged and unrecorded by the authors of scripture. Considered as religious historians, the evangelical preference was for details that supported their particular purposes in light of an acknowledged readership, that is, a unique faith community. Further, is it important for my faith that Jesus, as a master of wisdom, be the only son of God who is not born into the world as other human beings are, but is generated in a unique manner of being begotten? I think not. Given that my faith rests upon an inner need that requires a harmonizing agent to quell my spirit, the philosophical (affective) presence of Jesus, conceived as divine or not, will do just that. The teachings of Jesus, which render his presence objective, are more significant than the supposed divine status of the Nazarene. What does this perspective say about the philosophy supporting this clause? Clearly, the philosophy supporting this clause belongs to a different and earlier age that stresses a Lord and vassal relationship, not a master and disciple relationship.

¹⁵ John 6:15

7. *born of the Father before all ages.*

In the preceding clauses it has become apparent that the framers of the Creed reflected a different understanding of the universe and cosmos than we have today. From my perspective, retaining such understanding is an impediment rather than an aid to interpreting my faith. Must Jesus be born “outside” time, or before all ages? Does this imply the acceptance of a location, or a world that exists prior to time? I hold this understanding to be philosophically incorrect. Based on my experience there is only one world, this one, in which all events occur, physical and metaphysical. Metaphysical events are aspects of this world, they do not constitute another world. Jesus was incarnate “of this world” not of a pre-existing one. In light of that philosophical perspective, this clause requires a philosophical reassessment, it seems to me.

8. *God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God*

This clause continues the affirmation of superiority and exclusivity of the Christian God as I understand its epistemological origin. The terms intend to convey that there is none greater than the one God of Judeo-Christian origin. Such is the intent of the grammatical construction and linguistic convention of this clause to express the philosophical “nature” of the Father of Jesus. To my mind these phrases are rooted in Hellenic epistemology and read as highly rhetorical in formulation. Thus, in light of contemporary human consciousness, as an alternative to Hellenic epistemology, one may question whether they accurately describe the superiority and exclusiveness of the presence of the present God in the experience of the believer.

9. *begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;*

Why are these distinctions made? These classical terms describing the uniqueness and unity of Jesus of Nazareth with the Father have virtually no significance in describing my appreciation of the teachings of the Nazarene. They, in fact, arise from a hierarchical interpretation in a Hellenic philosophical sense of what it means “to be.” Could a better term be employed by not conceiving “being” in a pattern of a hierarchical structure, but a nodal one? Hierarchy reflects a pyramidal form, whereas nodal patterns reflect the form of an irregular ellipse, that is, there are many focal points that vary in significance and importance in relation to the borders of the organism and each other. Nodal patterns reflect regions of the human brain whose apparent function is to integrate and relate individual nodal activity. Of varying philosophical significance, nodes form a network of hubs whose relationship is not hierarchical, but

relational and irregular. That is, the network lacks the superior and inferior pattern of a hierarchy. The shift from a hierarchical pattern to a nodal pattern necessitates a philosophical re-defining of what it means “to be.”

10. *through him all things were made.*

Is it necessary to have God’s son as a co-agent participant present at creation? This notion has been reinforced through the doctrine of the Trinity with its philosophical roots in the initial verses of Genesis. Since I accept that the son of God was not a co-agent at the the act of creation, I consider him to be present as an observer, as it were. The traditional understanding of the trinitarian faith is not necessary for one to be a Christian, I conclude. To my mind, the status of observer is a more adequate and satisfactory role assigned to the second person of the trinity.

11. *For us men and for our salvation*

Why this purpose? Was it necessary? What has Jesus saved us from? Is this scripturally revealed dogma an adequate interpretation in light of contemporary scriptural studies? Why is salvation, if it is necessary, not universally recognized in all the world’s religions if God is concerned for all humanity? I hold, at the moment at least, that salvation is a theological notion that has arisen in human consciousness through the evolutionary process of a particular human culture and has been artfully “universalized” by Western Christianity. I doubt that humanity is actually “fallen,” such that it needs saving from itself and a return to a pristine state of original innocence. Rather, salvation is tantamount to the need for inner peace and harmony in this life. In other words, humans need to be saved from themselves, the origin of which, is in this world.

12. *he came down from heaven,*

Why this “location?” Why a descent from “on high?” Jesus could have originated and matured here on earth, among his own people, and have been perceived by them and others as possessing a unique human psychic ability. That is, he was a gifted person without being divine in the classical sense. As a philosopher of theology, I understand the post-resurrection encounters as psychic events, having an *affect* on the believer, whereas the pre-resurrection encounters are physical events having an *effect* on the the observer, as I interpret the scriptures. Heaven is the imaginative fabrication and subsequent projection of a perfect earth, not the affirmation of a separate utopian world one enters upon leaving this world

through death. Such a philosophical dichotomy between two worlds is an inheritance from Hellenist philosophy.

13. *and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary,*

Why introduce other agents, this time the holy spirit and a “virgin” girl? These are but a reflection of the cultural values at the time the Creed was formulated. They do not necessarily reflect the cultural values of most Christians today. Is there something being retained and promoted here in Western culture that is no longer necessarily relevant to justify the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth? I think it highly likely.

14. *and became man.*

That Jesus was not considered as human and not of this world before his incarnation is a Pauline philosophical opinion in my estimation.¹⁶ Does “Jesus” have to “pre-exist” as a non-embodied spirit? No, I answer. Need my philosophical conceptions include that he originates from elsewhere? I think not. Can he not be a prophet similar to all others? Yes, I think it seems to me. In short, must he be divine? Not to my mind, and one can still live as a faithful disciple of Jesus of Nazareth.

15. *For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,*

Why was humanity, or Christian believers at least, the motivation for his crucifixion? The good of humanity, human social welfare and any advantage to civilization does not appear to have been a necessary outcome of Jesus’ crucifixion to any significant degree. Was crucifixion not the penalty that ancient Rome set for treason? If so, a political motivation ultimately is at the source of Jesus’ crucifixion. This is a reasonable and sufficient explanation for Pilate’s involvement, to my mind.

16. *he suffered death and was buried,*

This clause sets the stage for the resurrection event as a supernatural miracle. It is in keeping with the presumption of a two-world perspective of the Christian faith. However, to my mind it is not necessary for contemporary Christian belief. One can accept Jesus’ teaching without acknowledging his death and burial and their cancellation in the next clause.

¹⁶ Philippians 2:6

17. *and rose again on the third day*

Why is the Latin verb *resurgere*, meaning “rise again,” used? Is it merely a literary convention or is there something else being conveyed here? (Paul’s overall theological perspective implies that Jesus returned in resurrected form to complete God’s work of salvation.) And why the third day? Is a time qualification necessary or is it simply to meet the cultural conventions and expectations of the day? To my mind this clause reinforces the divine nature of Jesus and is superfluous to living out his teachings.

18. *in accordance with the Scriptures.*

In my interpretation this clause intended to establish the continuity with an authority base, i.e., the canon of scripture arising within a particular sect. It is an overt appeal to the plan revealed by God beginning in the book of Genesis. It has no direct significance to the accuracy or correct understanding of Jesus’ teachings except to establish an external authority.

19. *He ascended into heaven*

Again, this clause is but an assertion of Jesus’ traditional original origin in another world. It is not easily reconciled with the doctrinal perspective introduced by Gregory Baum. Beginning at Vatican II, “it is possible for [the church] to re-interpret the creed and the body of Catholic teaching and, conserving the self-identical Gospel, to express them in contemporary language as a message dealing with the great problems of people today.”¹⁷

20. *and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*

These are two Western cultural values that have been incorporated into the creedal formula and which have taken on a dogmatic significance, i.e., “right hand” and “Father.” Concerning the right hand, the political philosophical concept implied here is dexter (superior) vs sinister (inferior). This begs the questions what was Jesus’ “correct” place beforehand? Why a heavenly, i.e., supernatural authority? Is an earthly, i.e., common authority insufficient? My obvious conclusion is that as a good servant of the Father’s will on earth, Jesus was promoted. This ancient understanding is not necessary for one to be qualified as a contemporary Christian. It arises from the inadequate philosophical perspective of Platonism and not is not applicable to our critical philosophical age. As a replacement for ancient

¹⁷ *Faith and Doctrine: A Contemporary View* (1969:133) Paulist Press.

understanding, human consciousness offers a better philosophical perspective for the interpretation of Jesus' teaching for contemporary humanity.

21. *He will come again in glory*

Why a second visit in glory to effect the judgement as the King of Righteousness? Could not the judgement, through the word of God, have been effected by a non-glorious prophetic inhabitant of Nazareth who taught in God's name? I think it could and therefore do not necessarily link judgement and glory. Also, I wonder could not the judgement have been effected the first time around in this life? Why the postponement to a later time?

22. *to judge the living and the dead*

This clause is contingent on a philosophy that posits two worlds to reflect the objective totality of God's realm. That is to say that no one escapes judgement living in this world or dead in the next as they await the end of time. i.e., the eschaton. The understanding of the "next world" has its own evolutionary history as to the status and location of the dead. There are the dead in purgatory, from which there is escape, and there are former earthlings now in heaven. Are they to be judged one might ask? The concern that lies at the bottom of this cultural construction needs to be re-thought and recast in light of a contemporary philosophical understanding of human life.

23. *and his kingdom will have no end.*

Why the need for permanency? This, to my mind, is a projection of a perfected but unsatisfied human desire and longing to return to something that once may have been the case. From a theological perspective this unfulfilled longing is contemplated as a fall from grace. However, from a philosophical perspective no one knows how "his kingdom" truly began, nor, if it did not begin but always was, and how, or if, it will end. These questions must remain philosophically speculative. Individual living organisms have a beginning and an end, but philosophers speculate that life itself is exempt from this temporal reality.

24. *I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,*

This is a further development of a theological understanding. Not only Jesus, but the Holy Spirit is also Lord. This understanding is a philosophical identification of two supernatural personalities that constitute the Trinity. There is here, in fact, a belief in two Lords. Yet, clearly the interpretive context of the Creed suggests a royal union, not a democratic unity.

25. *who proceeds from the Father [and the Son],*

This clause introduces an historical complexity that appears to be optional in the mind of the Council. In Byzantine philosophy, the Father is the only source for the Holy Spirit. In the West, the Son participates in the Father's work as a source who sends the Holy Spirit. I hold that the *filioque* clause, though in a dogmatic Creed, is optional.

26. *who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,*

This clause is a further affirmation of the theological belief that the true God acts as a trinity of persons, but not as a single agency. But is this conception a necessarily correct description? To me, it seems not. To my mind, the notion of trinity is a reflection of the psychic experience and subsequent philosophical interpretation of the faithful, rather than a description of the constitutive nature of God. This conception of the constitutive nature of God remained unchallenged after its formulation and was bolstered by imperial enforcement from the end of the fourth century. However, in the post-Reformation era, the origin, meaning, and justification of this doctrine has been philosophically disputed. In the context of an analytic philosophy of religion many Christian philosophers have criticized religious faith in which doctrines are given formulations that are overly precise. They may be more easily defensible but only at the expense of limiting the truth of experience. But the Creed, for which faith provides no rational justification, readily endorses the adoration and glorification of the Trinity.

27. *who has spoken through the prophets.*

From a philosophical perspective, what is it for the Holy Spirit to speak through the prophets? Keep in mind that prophets are not reserved to the Judeo-Christian tradition. As I understand it, in the Judeo-Christian tradition prophets provide a political commentary on human activity undertaken in God's presence within the Hebrew nation and in the nation of Israel and by extension, the world. As vessels of the Holy Spirit their particular purpose is to show that the God of Israel is different from the gods of

other nations. The prophets do not support any statecraft that would oppose the God of Israel. “This is why I have torn them to pieces by the prophets, why I slaughtered them with the words from my mouth”

¹⁸ Prophets are not patriots of the state since it might attempt to become sovereign over God. God is to remain sovereign over states. This view reverses the mistaken but popular interpretation that prophets interpret God’s law and predict the future in some manner. Prophets, I believe, are raised up during a religious crisis (usually caused by God’s opponents) when ordinary principles of doctrine are in the process of failing and a return to God is required. Within biblical prophecy it is the good of the individual in community, not the good of the state that God seeks out during a religious crisis. Prophets do not necessarily reinforce previous revelation, but preferably manifest the will of God in a particular situation that is culture-bound. Such is my understanding of their role in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Clearly, in terms of the Creed this view excludes belief in the prophets of other peoples and other religious traditions. However, this restrictive role may have to be reconsidered.

28. *I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.*

The adjectives of this clause shift the focus of belief to the *political* character of the Church. That is the normative understanding of the Church’s essence as a societal presence and social good. The believer confesses that it is politically beneficial for society that the Church be one, be holy, be Catholic and be apostolic. From a theological perspective these four principles are known classically as the “marks” of the Church. Unity [not a number, but a quality] of the Church recalls the principle of understanding the Church historically and politically as a worldly monarchy and as the only means whereby peace, justice, liberty and salvation may be secured. The quality of unity takes on the “shadow” side of union when it becomes integrated with a territorial state that acquires power from its citizens for use in its own right. Thus, I exclude the legitimacy by any Caesaro-papist monarch to the claim of a “divine right of kings.” I would suggest, however, that a democratic theory of the “divine right of the faithful” to replace the royal understanding of monarchical authority, and hence hierarchical sovereignty, is philosophically acceptable. In short, authority is dispersed individually among the faithful, with all their limitations, (as in pre-Constantinian days) and not concentrated in a particular human being or organization.

In my philosophical context “holy” represents a theory of the totality of value. Theologically, it includes all that there is and excludes any negativity which nullifies value, hence there exists no such thing as

¹⁸ Hosea 6:5

independent evil, only a privation of value, i.e., the good. That is to say, there is nothing valueless in the true Church of Christ, (which is not to be equated with a sociological construct), since holiness represents the transcendence of God who is not a physical being. The philosophical and political problem is then, that when the Church is reduced to a constituent member of the social order, it is subject to human laws as a sociological construction.

“Catholicity” is not sovereignty. Sovereignty, in the contemporary era, means supreme authority within a territory. It is a notion of *political* authority. Catholicity is not defined by territory. Rather, from a theological perspective, Catholicity initially consisted of personal belief in the *corpus naturale*, i.e., the sacrament on the altar, and the *corpus mysticum*, i.e., the social body of the faithful with a particular administrative structure, which later was transferred to the territorial body politic. The origin of sovereignty in the West is perceived as having originated within two social developments. The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and the laws and practices to protect human rights arising after World War II. Catholicity attaches to the consciousness of the faithful, and as a quality does not describe any temporal sovereign authority. One might say that the Papacy is a complex constitutional monarchy wherein the Pope is *ex officio* sovereign of Vatican City (a temporal office) and Vicar of Christ (a moral office). One says that Queen Elizabeth II is the British sovereign i.e., Head of State of England, and all her territories. But interestingly, she is the supreme governor (not sovereign) of the Church of England, which is an administrative agent of the Christian faithful (*ecclesia anglicana*) of England. Territoriality is now taken for granted in defining political states but there is no equivalent notion of territoriality in the concept of Catholicity in contemporary religious sociology or philosophy. Although there is such a concept in Catholicism, one might argue. In short, membership in the Church is not defined by territorial borders.

Today the theological notion of apostolic succession admits of several levels of interpretation. I question if acceptance of any territorial qualification is necessary to be a faithful Christian. In light of Catholic understanding, I wonder if the Church need be perceived as an aspiring ideal sociological state. In apostolic times, membership in the Church did not require ownership of any property whatsoever. The “apostolic poverty” of the early Church means no territorial ownership. The Church is a moral and spiritual organism, not an economic or fiduciary organization. To my mind, an understanding worthy of contemporary belief is that since the Church is not founded on the materially-based laws of humanity, but on the spiritually-grounded *lex Christi*, it must be absolutely free of property ownership thus enabling it to better practice the spiritual purity required by an apostolic Church.

29. *I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins*

Originally, and I mean pre-Christian, baptism was most likely a rite of initiation undertaken by an individual for entry into a group indicating social or religious privileges. It was some visible sign which varied from culture to culture which sealed the bond of fellowship within the group. Further, in some cases there was probably a removal of some sort of tabu, or demonic possession (an exorcism of hostile superhuman beings) on the part of the individual along with the assumption of a new name and new tribal responsibilities. Demons, common in ancient pre-Christian cultures, were often thought to inhabit another world than the one inhabited by humans. They often visited the human world to wreak havoc. However, Christians re-shaped baptism into a sacrament displaying various forms, and becoming less mystical and more a sign of salvation and a higher moral life. This is to say that there is a hidden doctrinal understanding in this clause that is contested by many Christians. The meaning and form of baptism in today's secular culture does not enjoy an agreed philosophical or theological conviction for salvation. That is to say: *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* is no longer universally accepted theologically or philosophically. I reject the belief that there is only one baptism that initiates members into the Church saving them from perdition.¹⁹ Philosophically, one may distinguish baptism as both an entrance into the life of Jesus of Nazareth and as an entrance into the Church. The latter may not be necessary, but merely desired. Given that, as previously noted, Jesus died for humanity's sins, many contemporary philosophers are reconsidering the roots of baptism and a new understanding of its purpose and form.

30. *and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead*

An interest for many philosophers is death. How are we to understand the mortality of living things including our own? But what precisely is death that resurrection frees me from it? Death cannot be annihilation since there is something remaining after physical death to be resurrected. Is resurrection a survival of death? I wonder about that. Is it true that a person is annihilated when he or she dies, or does a person survive death in some unique manner in philosophical understanding? To my mind, this question must remain uncertain philosophically and theologically. And, as I further understand it, this question has no necessary bearing on living the Christian life in this world. "The resurrection of the dead" is a faith-statement for the allaying of anxiety on the part of the believer. One may also ask: Will

¹⁹ As Gregory Baum has remarked: "Many Christians today will accept a doctrine on the Church only if it becomes a key for the understanding of the whole human community." *The Credibility of the Church Today: A Reply to Charles Davis*, (1968:19) Herder & Herder.

resurrection be a transition into a future other world, or will it be a return to this one in its glorified state? My answer is given in the comment on the next clause. Bear in mind that the Lazarus story is about resuscitation, not resurrection. Lazarus was not resurrected, but resuscitated, only to die later.²⁰

31. *and the life of the world to come.*

This clause concerns the future. But, I ask, is the future determined or indeterminate? No philosophical answer can be conclusively given. Some pre-Christian philosophers held that all future events are contingent or non-apodictic. Yet some more recent philosophers, have recognized that the idea of necessity, characteristic of ancient Greek philosophy, supplied the notion to Christian philosophers of a changeless and fixed universe in which all events were determined by Divine authority and not by chance. In Western thinking time is composed of past, present and future of which the future is an unknown stage when time is interpreted as linear. In non-Western philosophies time is understood as cyclic, not linear. There are no stages of time that might suggest a dichotomy of worlds. Time is a continuous present containing all that there is, past and future, known and unknown. The “next world,” or the world to come of Western thought, is a metaphorical location for the same life, as lived here, to continue after death in the “next world,” minus all pathology. The cyclic perspective of life and death holds that the dead remain in this world but are present in another fashion. That is to say, death is the “old” life refashioned. The Western distinction between resuscitation and resurrection is significant in that resuscitation returns life to its old standard, but theologically (and philosophically) resurrection overturns the dichotomy in the individuated “old” life returning it to its original unity. In this sense the “old” life becomes “new.” Both the “old” or current life (physical) and the “new” (dead) life are present within this same world, without the Hellenistic dichotomy, but as a relational phenomenological event.

32. *Amen.*

²⁰ John 11:1-14.

Chapter Three

HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS AND A CREED OF LIFE

The issue is that science has done away with the worn-out, outmoded forms of the ancient Creed, and yet has done nothing to fill the vacuum it has created.

Introduction

The ideas I have discussed in this brief book have been generated in a pre-internet era and without the experience of the World Wide Web. Which is to say that any future discussion of them by philosophers will need to take into account their personal experience of the internet and WWW. These experiences will, I suspect, throw a new light on these ideas and deepen one's personal consciousness.

To my mind, a Creed of Life arises within human consciousness and is based on a "psychology of knowledge," rather than a set of philosophical propositions. Both arise within a particular culture. A psychology of knowledge differs from an epistemology in that it is continually evolving along with human consciousness. Epistemology, as understood in the West, arises out of the development of Hellenistic philosophy which, in fact, does not evolve.

The formulation of a Creed of Life represents a "turning point" in one's personal and intellectual life which may, in fact, surpass the Church's established Creed of belief. This does not mean that one's Creed of Life surpasses the Church's Creed by adding quantitatively new principles to create new truths. Rather, one's Creed of Life is qualitatively formulated within personal self-awareness which makes us see ourselves in a new light.

Most significantly is that in one's Creed of Life the notion of the first clause will need to be released from its Hellenistic formulation. Here the object of the human mind, i.e., God is understood as something grasped from outside of and independent of the human mind. Within my understanding of consciousness, the object of the human mind is not conceived as a substantive idea outside the mind. Rather, it is a notion generated by and subsequently projected by the human mind outside of itself.

The human community, best understood as a religious community for the formulation of a Creed of Life, is created by one's will to accept others and to subordinate one's personal goals to the common humanitarian goals of others. All human cultures exhibit some form of this willfulness within their social

constructions, often opposite countervailing and dehumanizing values. (Contrast this with the willful establishment of the nation-state whose purpose is to protect its citizens and not to determine goals for human beings.) The nation-state has the delegated authority from its citizens to establish the legal rights for the benefit of its citizens, individually and collectively. It has no delegated authority to establish human rights. That is to say that a collection of nation-states does not determine the definition of what it means to be human.

Problems with one's Creed of Life arise when one has internalized institutional pressures so strongly that it is difficult to conceive of belief and fidelity in any other way than through the institution's established, and subsequently inherited, terminology. To the contrary a Creed of Life is a personal product of one's consciousness, not a product of an institution, i.e., in the religious sense the Church, or in the secular sense, the State.

True freedom is not merely release from the historical past, but is also unrestrained creativeness for the future. That is to say that nothing is reserved from human conscious creativity. The existential fact is that the temporal past lives in the present moment of life as human memory, and the undetermined future lives in the present moment of life as speculation. Neither past nor future is concrete, but the present is.

A Creed of Life, like a creed of religious truth, is not universal but is particular and individually contingent. A Creed of Life is established when the ordinary is experienced in unordinary ways. There is no comprehensive meaning to the personal experience of human beings. An individual human organism creates its own ordering system. Like minded human organisms subsequently create intersubjectively a community ordering system which can sustain itself amid chaos and confusion.

The positive establishment of a Creed of Life is an intervention in the polity or in the politics of life. Thus, a Creed of Life functions to liberate rather than oppress humanity and oppose humanity's healthy religious way of life. In the evolutionary process of establishing a Creed of Life, decentralization of ecclesiastical government is necessary for individual freedom of conscience. This is so since one's Creed of Life is developed outside of and beyond the traditional ecclesiastical way of life.

The nature of the Christian church requires an established and collective Creed appropriate only for the believing community and its theological mission. The nature of the human society, however, calls for an interdisciplinary Creed of Life susceptible by all for its personal and philosophical mission.

Christianity can only retain its attractiveness for future generations by freeing itself from any connection with the dogmatic conceptions of God and Christ with which it became identified to survive in the Hellenistic world. Christianity to survive into the future, as a credible religion, needs be able to identify with a global world consisting of many non-dogmatic and non-Western cultures.

The idea of religion necessarily implies that of authority. Christianity as a religion is essentially a manifestation of God's authority, real or imagined, in Western history. There is no hostility from within Christian churches towards the "word of God" as being an absolute authority in a theological sense. What is in question, due to modern biblical exegesis, is authority attributed to the Bible as a *normative expression* of the word of God in both the Reformed tradition and the Catholic tradition of religious belief. The authority of the word of God manifests itself through the Revelation of the prophets. The prophets, who spoke the words of Revelation, were fallible in themselves and possessed a conscious perspective of a specific focal point. The words of the prophets were interpreted through some form of knowledge; initially the wisdom of experience, and later the reason of philosophy. These days human consciousness replaces classical epistemology as the operative system in the minds of many contemporary philosophers. The authority of God's word recognized by consciousness shares little in common with the dogmatic authority of Bible or Church.

Jesus of Nazareth left no formal intellectual style or school of thought by which to discuss his thoughts. The interpretive perspective of his thought was left to the evangelists. Lacking any official school of thought human consciousness becomes a ground of assurance accessible to all the faithful replacing any external and temporal infallible authority. The notion of the external "authority of God," as a conviction of faith, originated within human consciousness and has been subsequently projected beyond human experience.

A Philosophical Criticism of Faith and Belief

Political philosophy is fallible, limited, and relative such as those of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, and one has the right to question them. The Christian religion, however, is not a political philosophy in any sociological or theological sense. God, as a presence, has no history. The agents of God have a history, however. That is to say, God's history is revealed through the agent's experience of life. In that

sense, religious beliefs are historical and psychological and are susceptible to a critical study as the interpretive object of consciousness. Contemporary philosophers, interpreting God as the object of conscious experience, arrive at the different conception of God as being an actor, not an agent, involved in human history. But as an actor projecting perfected humanity God is not lacking in the admiration of ordinary humans.

History is not merely a chronology of physical events. History is the subjective interpretation and representation of experience. It is an abstraction, by the intellect, from one's total experience which accounts for the stage of evolution at which one has currently arrived Faith is part of the interpretation of human experience. Faith is not belief, that is, it is not an intellectual act. Faith is a conscious, or moral act of the human will which possess sufficient warrant in itself for acceptance by the person. As a moral act of the will, faith implies a trustworthy relationship between person and person, or agent and agent. One can have faith in oneself, or alternatively, have no faith in oneself. This decision is the result of the unique capacity humans have for self-consciousness and self-reflection.

Belief, on the other hand, is an intellectual act by which the mind gives assent to a historic occurrence, or idea, or a doctrinal or dogmatic fact. Unlike faith, the assurance of belief is founded on an external authority and an objective order of knowledge capable of logical or historical demonstration.

Logical and historical demonstration precede belief, they are not subsequent to belief. In other words, I first have an opinion, which may or may not be a fact, which becomes belief through logic and demonstration. However, external logic and demonstration cannot compel nor determine my conscience. All mentally healthy human beings have the capacity to question the facts.

The Authoritative Form of Consciousness

Why have infallible authorities, i.e., religious authorities, become fallible authorities, i.e., individuals, in the course of ages? This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in Western culture. The religions of antiquity that were religions of authority displayed a particular sociological pattern. This sociological pattern revealed an evolutionary transfer of power from the collective, i.e., the nobility and clergy, to the individual, i.e., commoners and the faithful. Something similar also appears to have occurred in the history of civilizations. Cultural customs of a particular civilization persisted and were eventually modified and projected from a lower form of civilization to a higher form of civilization whose architects

believed that they had sophisticatedly transcended the earlier civilization. That is to say modern civilization morally transcends Victorian civilization. But truthfully it hasn't. The notion that the moral consciousness of the present civilization transcends the past is clearly evident when contemporary religion and politics are separated in the current Western manner. The present relationship between the two is always perceived as better than the past relationship especially by the majority of secularly minded people who subscribe to a modern disenchanted universe. That is, the separation of Church and State is better than a theocracy. Authority and its role in the separation of Church and State is to be determined by human consciousness in whatever cultural form such authority takes.

Cultural forms of authority are initially perceived as necessary as consciousness realizes itself. However, external cultural authority, which is oppressive to consciousness, is slowly giving way to internal personal authority, which is a liberating experience for human consciousness. As the ultimate capacity of moral development in the human being, consciousness cannot be constrained from without. Consciousness animates and determines itself from within. In this manner it maintains its life.

From a contemporary philosophical perspective, the religious ideal and the human ideal are existentially identical. This is so since only humans are characterized by religion. In the world of brutes there is no socio-philosophical equivalent of the brute being religious. The religion of consciousness is the religion of liberty not in the sense of freedom *from* the past, but in the sense of freedom *for* the future. The religion of consciousness is also the religion of holiness, i.e., something to be set aside by the believer and distinguished from the ordinary and profane in life. Such holiness gives birth to a *Creed of Life*. One's contemporary Creed of Life arises within a personal interpretation of personal experience. Thus, in many cases, one's contemporary Creed of Life may not equate to one's inherited ecclesiastical Creed.

Consciousness in Jesus of Nazareth

Jesus' method of authority is characterized by a maieutic, that is, soliciting new ideas from other ideas. In this method of instruction, the agent is, in fact, the disciple, not the master. The maieutic method of instruction resembles the Socratic method in approach to teaching and learning. In his teaching Jesus appeals to the individual consciousness, not any external authority. He employs logic and reason appropriate to the culture of his day. His arguments are *ad hominem* in a healthy sense and are not intended to establish a new religion of authority. The authority of Jesus of Nazareth is the authority that

arises within one's consciousness which transfers any debate or interpretation over tradition or dogma to the assessment of one's own conscience.

Jesus sets aside all that contradicts his own experience and emphasizes that which confirms it. He desires to create the same moral consciousness in his disciples. Jesus did not teach as the scribes taught, but taught in the sense of raising the particular consciousness of others. Consciousness, once raised, recognizes the agent "me" from other agents and actors as "not me." That is to say that in a philosophical sense consciousness having been raised distinguishes between the "me" and "not me" by assigning a moral and ethical meaning to both.

The revelation in Jesus of Nazareth is not a message from God. The revelation in Jesus of Nazareth is but human conscious understanding developed to a greater depth of insight. The essence of revelation is not superimposed on human consciousness. The essence of revelation is an internal autonomy in opposition to an external authority.

Revelation within Consciousness

Religious consciousness is a positive and well-defined capacity for self-consciousness. A manifestation of revelation within of consciousness is liberty, or freedom for the future. To be free for the future is to be autonomous, that is, to live, as an agent, the Judeo-Christian "law" within oneself.²¹ Liberty is a quality of the present conscious human life which determines itself and cannot ever be static. Were human consciousness to be static it would amount to the self-destruction of the agent.

God is in humanity but in such a way that God can only be harmed if humanity harms itself by creating and projecting the wrong values. Religious consciousness is born in tutelage and must *be guided* by external law. Having awakened reason, consciousness asserts itself as an autonomous capacity which judges all things and only obeys when it is convinced of the truthfulness of its relationship to its object. Thus, it is impossible for humanity to become conscious of itself without sitting in judgment of itself. Humanity produces images or ideas of itself in the conscious process of evolution. Such ideas and images, which are the objects of consciousness, are symbolic and ultimately inadequate to express the total reality of human experience. Over time such images and ideas become modified and represent

²¹ I intend "law" to be understood in the Paulinian sense.

various philosophical, scientific and techno-digital interpretations, but forever they must remain incomplete.

Life is a prerequisite for thought (machines do not think) and religious belief precedes theology (humans are faithful before they are rational). Thought either enriches or impoverishes life. Theology either enriches or impoverishes religious belief. To be noted is that theology is born of belief, whereas, philosophy is born of experience. An individual's experience is only part of the total human experience available, and hence an individual's philosophical interpretation reflects only a particular part of the total human experience. In this context, agents who are free to shape their future confirm their independence and inherent value as human beings, which they interpret as philosophers.

Observation and Experiment in a Religion of Consciousness

A religion of consciousness needs some form of theological expression which is scientific in the classical sense of wisdom. That is to say, the attempt to reconcile a religion of consciousness, i.e., autonomy, with observation and experiment as understood in the modern or techno-digital model of science, i.e., as authority, is an effort doomed to failure. Observation and experiment alone do not establish moral authority.

The contemporary question for theologians is whether or not they may achieve their proper place among contemporary scientists and technicians or will they be shut out due to a lack of interest by the uncritical masses captivated by 21st century scientific achievement. Will these scientists accept theologians as colleagues? For this to happen theologians must create a methodology of observation compatible with, but not identical to, contemporary scientific experience. The most transcendent theology remains an intellectual product of human wisdom, not of modern science. Human subjectivity is inherent in all science. Scientists use mathematics, an abstracted metaphysical reality, in their calculations when experimenting with space, matter and time to correlate the ideas of size, quantity and relationships. For mathematical abstractions to be objective they must adhere to an intersubjective consensus of what determines human intelligibility and objective knowledge that can be translated into computer language and programmed into computer technology to drive the non-living machine, i.e., the computer.

The interpretation of the virtues, themselves understood as abstracted metaphysical reality, does not follow the methodology of calculation employed by mathematicians. The interpretation of the virtues

cannot be programmed into computer language and computer technology to drive a non-living computer machine. Moral scientists, in the classical sense, i.e., the philosophers, cannot import, without modification, the techno-digital principles of cause and effect into their deliberations. One's personal experience should confirm this deduction. A religion of conscious knowledge (consciousness) reveals the creativity of civilizations that reflect the evolutionary process of the human spirit. Uncivilized tribal communities display no religion of consciousness in the contemporary Western philosophical sense. In other words, they display no evolutionary process as a human presence on earth.

Theologians of a religion of consciousness are primarily *theological philosophers* who contemplate a religion of consciousness appropriate to all humanity. A religion of consciousness never manifests itself outside physical context. It manifests itself in physical activity. As such a religion of consciousness has no independent being and is not to be confused with the principle of life. All consciousness must have an object, i.e., another or itself, and is but a variable quality of life. Life somehow generates human consciousness, i.e., an understanding of "me" and "not-me" as objects of knowledge and belief. Beliefs are not revelation but products of the intellect. To be recalled is that the theological philosopher speaks of the *life* of faith, a subjective reality, and the *form* of belief, an objective reality.

Theological philosophers of a religion of consciousness are unlike the speculative thinkers of the classical era, but are contemporary existential (phenomenological) thinkers. They may in fact be classified as sociologists focusing on an interpretation of a dynamic collective experience, not to be confused with experiment. Theological philosophers within a contemporary religion of consciousness confront the dogmas and beliefs of the classical past from a perspective which centuries of Western culture were unable to undertake.

A religion of consciousness creates an elementary notion of God capable of being idealized as a useful fiction by the intelligent human being. Here, I am taking Gregory Baum's comment one step further.²² As a useful fiction it removes the inherited Hellenistic dichotomy between God and humanity. Thus, God is not conceived as an independent reality with substantive metaphysical attributes. A religion of consciousness, even within the secularism of the current Western tradition, generates a creative cognizance of God as humanity's "perfect" image of itself and subsequently projected as God. Thus,

²² He stated: "It is my conviction that the re-focusing that has taken place at Vatican II leads to a re-interpretation even of the notion of God, in particular of the divine transcendence." *The Credibility of the Church Today: A Reply to Charles Davis* (1968:172) Herder & Herder.

consciousness of the Christian religion may envision Jesus of Nazareth as a creative cognizance of God incarnate, rather than a prophet of God. It is the historic human consciousness of Jesus of Nazareth as God incarnate that is expressed in the life of the ecclesia. However, the historic consciousness of Jesus the Christ is not expressed in 30 or so year life of Jesus of Nazareth.

Plurality and a Personal Creed of Life

A personal Creed of Life draws its inspiration in opposition to a particular movement within modern Catholicism, i.e., the ultramontane movement which flourished approximately from 1850 to 1960. A Creed of Life is a historical answer to a historical problem. There was no acknowledged personal Catholic Creed of Life prior to 1960, but only the collective Ecclesiastical Creed of Nicaea formulated to fit a Roman theological perspective. The Creed of Nicaea was ecclesiastically systematized, approved and propagated as a necessary dogma of the faith. However, before Nicaea the clauses of the Creed were popularly discussed and argued by Catholics before being formalized into a Creed. At the time of the Council of Nicaea certain clauses were given a frame of reference that did not develop beyond the Hellenic cultural context and became irreversibly fixed. During the era of ultramontane mass Catholicism this fixity took on special significance in terms of centralizing the authority of the Church.

Ultramontane mass Catholicism engendered within itself a theological *reconquista* movement to reinforce the centralization of universal Catholicism. The theological *reconquista* movement was intended to renew politically the establishment of ecclesiastical authority in light of a perceived democratization of the Church. Centralized universal authority, supported by ultramontane mass Catholicism, was being challenged by the notion of the localized autonomy of the faithful thus creating a Catholic subculture. Localized autonomy of the faithful was seriously debated by those opposing the centralization of ultramontane mass Catholicism. That unqualified assent was to be given to the Nicene Creed by the faithful was a significant focal point in the debate among theologians and philosophers. Further, the context of modernity made a higher degree of autonomy politically possible. Whereas the centralization of ultramontane mass Catholicism did the opposite raising the Nicene Creed to a level of divine Revelation and thus beyond discussion.

The aim of ultramontane assent to the Creed was to establish an objective and systematic set of required beliefs intended to become an essential and necessary part of the Christian message. The Nicene Creed

was to be a demarcation of truth as opposed to heresy which was regarded as dangerous. Modern philosophers and modern scientists challenged this demarcation. In reaction, a dogmatic theology of truth was established by Roman authorities thus suppressing legitimate alternatives. Although Vatican Council II would weaken the demarcation that had been established by ultramontane theologians its effects are still felt by the faithful today.

The creation of a personal Creed of Life, in light of the dominance of the Nicene Creed, seems unprecedented. It is not in keeping with the centralized authority of the Church as envisioned by the Nicene Creed. This Creed became the sum total of Christian belief to which all Christians were to submit, thus restoring Catholic order to belief. Can the Nicene Creed maintain its vitality and authority outside its context of origin and still command the assent of the faithful? Will it become outdated like many other aspects of pre-Vatican II Catholicism? The Nicene Creed is a historically specific product of a historically specific form of Catholicism.

In the 1960s ultramontane Catholicism began to collapse and assent to the credal formulation began to wane with the introduction of the concepts of secularism and individualism in the West. Today, the Nicene Creed no longer compels a universal conviction of belief among the mass of Catholics as it did prior to 1960. With the hierarchically driven Catholicism waning, a pluralistic Catholicity is becoming evident and many individual Catholics today live in “high” modernity keeping an internal psychic distance from all authoritative social organizations, including the Church. In this context, the articles of the Creed are being questioned, subsequently losing their sanctioned interpretation. It cannot be assumed that in our critical era that a new sanctioned philosophical and theological status for the Creed of Christian belief will emerge. Instead of one dominant theological language for the formulation of belief (Nicene Creed), various linguistic forms are available for theological expression (personal Creed of Life) and, in fact, most likely will compete with each other. That is to say, whereas the Nicene Creed acknowledges one God, a personal Creed of Life may acknowledge many gods.

Creedal formulations rooted deeply in a culture do not disappear suddenly. To meet an evolutionary creedal understanding of belief, many types of adaptive philosophical strategies are attempted. Some will be more successful than others. All current strategies, however, are influenced by evolutionary changes in the perspective of the global world order, changes in understanding ecology, in understanding feminism and a major change in understanding the mass consumer society due to the internet and World

Wide Web. The internal decentralization of the Church began in the 1960s when the Western Italian based institution began to evolve into a Church with a worldwide philosophical perspective. Vatican II was an obvious watershed as evident in the cosmopolitan thinking of the Council attendees. However, doctrinal innovation was suspect by some members of the Council and for it to be legitimated it had to be rooted in the Church's intellectual tradition of scholastic understanding. But in fact, the decline of Rome's authority opened the way for secular and professional expertise on the part of the faithful to be brought to bear on philosophical and theological interpretation. This led to the *reconquista* strategy being virtually abandoned in Catholic theological circles. A contemporary evangelical perspective (due to scripture studies) and commitment to personal consciousness (due to philosophical studies) gave rise to Catholicity as opposed to Catholicism. The dominance of natural law and classical Christian theology were trumped by contemporary ecclesial values addressed pontifically to all humanity. Thus, any endorsement of the retention of an ultramontane perspective by Vatican II is difficult to maintain.

The contemporary evangelical attitude has introduced two significant changes in understanding plurality and a Creed of Life. One, many contemporary theologians are detaching themselves from the theological hegemony of the magisterium and, two, the ultramontane Church, as a mass organization of uniform belief, is waning. In this context, any rejection of plurality and an attempt to return uniformity will only alienate the Catholic faithful who possess an enlightened philosophical consciousness. The task of contemporary theological philosophers is to create a philosophy that is acceptable in creating a Creed of Life within the world of semi-secularized global societies.

Chapter Four

POSTLUDE: A PERSONAL CREED OF LIFE

After World War I, a new Western world was born, as it were. However, as J. Middleton Murry noted, it was really not a new world but the old one clearly seen for the first time. It was a new world for those for whom the lines of cultural demarcation were understood entirely differently from what they had seemed to be. This new world, at first, seemed cold, alien and hostile. Yet soon afterwards it appeared to have fresh hope as new insights were revealed and new lessons learned from a past and broken world.

This is where I am today. That is, I continue to learn new lessons and insights about life from my past and somewhat broken philosophical world. In formulating a Creed of Life, I continue to seek deeper insights into the presence of God. I have come to realize that it is not how accurate I am in my understanding that is important but rather how truthfully, I interpret my experience. I am not seeking objective truth within my experience, but I am seeking an authentic interpretation of my experience in contrast to illusion or fantasy which are tricks of an imagining mind. In other words, I seek what is truly real. And, any authentic interpretation I make must be made in light of the philosophical changes taking place in contemporary Western society. As I contemplate the changes in my life-world, I see that phenomenological philosophy is not readily accepted by many of my contemporaries as a means of achieving interpretive authenticity. Not everyone accepts that the phenomenological method is one that satisfies and clarifies. To some, in fact, the phenomenological method obscures their understanding and thus dissatisfies them. Yet, in my case the opposite has occurred. Over time, I came to the conclusion that scholasticism, with its dichotomous structure in philosophical understanding, hindered my thinking.

I do realize, of course, that the limitations of scholasticism are the limitations traceable to a particular time and culture. They are the limitations of a philosophical language and speech that have not kept pace with contemporary experience. In my case, not even a revised form of scholasticism satisfactorily overcame these limitations. The revised form of scholasticism to which I refer is neo-Thomism. Through neo-Thomism I was not able to express my experience satisfactorily. However, given a phenomenological interpretation of my experience within a non-dichotomous relational unity, I was able to interpret satisfactorily my experience and thereby overcome the limitations of scholasticism. Now I

can contrast my present experience with my past experience and act consciously to create a personal Creed of Life. My personal Creed of Life means that I live within my cultural confines, but I need not be constrained by them. Formerly, I experienced the cultural limitations in my past as presented through a philosophy of classical humanism. However, today I interpret my culture through a liberating phenomenological philosophy.

Within my Creed of Life, my interpretive task is contingent and perpetual. As an existential thinker, I know that there is no such thing as a final philosophy or theology. I conceive my work as different from the work of the theologians of the past when the humanistic philosophical systems of the West were being constructed. As I see it, the task of the contemporary religious philosopher and theologian is as follows. It is to make known the truthfulness of *reasoned belief* in and about God to a new generation of Western philosophers through a phenomenological philosophy, that is, through a dehellenized philosophy. I find that the principal merit and usefulness of a dehellenized philosophy is its capacity for revealing a non-Hellenic, contemporary human identity from experience. Philosophy is culturally influenced by occidental thinkers, and by oriental thinkers, respectively. But, unlike classical occidental philosophers, contemporary occidental philosophers choose not to be confined to a given system of knowledge, nor a methodology of established norms. Contemporary occidental philosophers explore an alternative conscious interpretation and as such they can utilize any methodology for interpretation of their experience. To my mind, any philosophy, Eastern or Western, even of the untutored sort, can provide some degree of satisfaction in religious interpretation and in creating a Creed of Life.

Natural theology, as a philosophy deriving knowledge of God from the study of nature independent of revelation, and as a formal academic discipline in its own right, is not confined to the Western Catholic ecclesiastical tradition. Natural theology, considered as a philosophy, may also be a proper way of inquiring into the world as created by God, rather than inquiring into God as revealed in the world. As an ecclesial theologian, I am required to interpret revelation within the *sensus fidelium*, that is, taking into account the the understanding of the faithful who constitute the church. But as a philosopher of theology, I am not limited to this ecclesial context.

For any philosophy and theology to bear fruit for a Creed of Life, they must be able express seriously the personal (qualitative) and existential (quantitative) experience of the faithful. At one point in the

process of evaluating my inherited philosophical understanding, I compared and contrasted the thought of the theologian George Tyrrell (1861-1909) to that of the theological philosopher Leslie Dewart (1922-2009). I then compared their thoughts with my philosophical understanding. In this comparison I found it to be unfortunate that in the development of Western philosophy and theology the place of philosophy in relation to theology has been usurped to a great extent by sociology and psychology.

Contemporary philosophical thinking represents a shift away from the old-style theological polemics towards a new approach of ecumenical cooperation among Western theologians. For such thinkers, Western theology which traditionally has been influenced by classical philosophy has shifted to a discursive theology, often interpreted through phenomenological philosophy. It was within this context of a discursive phenomenology that I was able to make sense of my personal experience and re-adjust my identity and create a personal Creed of Life. And in making sense of my experience, I found that I had to undertake an existential perspective to tell of my “that was then; this is now” evolutionary understanding. Being a theologian, understanding the presence of God is a particular focus in my life. My on-going theological preoccupation has its roots in the Roman Catholic theological tradition that was in vogue in the early 20th century, particularly that of the *Nouvelle Théologie*. It was through this approach to theologizing that I found the beginnings of fresh insights leading to contemporary thresholds of theological insight.

I draw the reader’s attention to the fact that many current creative and insightful contributions from philosophers and theologians are often quoted and discussed by established academics and professional journalists. These established academics and professional journalists often truly believe they have understood, and correctly expounded, the ideas of innovative philosophical and theological thinkers. And in most cases, they probably have done so, but not always. George Tyrrell’s (1861-1909) life-story of creative and innovative theologizing is a case in point. The appreciation of his style of creative and innovative thinking is not as well recognized as it could be among the Christian faithful. David Schultenover in his book described, not the Modernist Movement and Tyrrell’s role in it, but the intellectual development of a major contributor to that movement by focusing on the man and his thought. Tyrrell was a significant influence in the development of my Creed of Life.

One of the often-heard criticisms of Modernity is that it sets up a false confidence in rationalism and science. Given their capacity in categorizing and explaining human experience, rationalism and science are often seen as being able to convey the totality of human experience and personal identity. Once I realized that this could not ultimately be the case, that neither of them could convey the totality of human experience, nor identity, I created a Creed of Life which directed me away from the dichotomous Hellenic philosophical understanding, still somewhat evident in the sciences, to a phenomenological philosophical understanding.

The sociological institution from which I inherited my theology is the Catholic church. The specialized theological discipline which explores the various denominations within the Catholic church is called ecclesiology. The differing interpretations of the sacred texts by Catholic, Reformed and Protestant denominations, plus the political, philosophical, historical and ecumenical movements occurring among them has resulted in a diverse self-understanding of these churches. Thus, the Christian church, embracing the Creed of Life of the various faithful, will most likely not be a societal construction *imposed* upon the collective faithful. Rather, the church will be disclosed as a communion of communities *constituted* by the various faithful of each community with their own self-understanding, history, culture and traditions.

There is a variety of expression in the church which reflects a variety of local cultures. Because of the integrated relationship in the Church of the West between philosophy and theology, my contention for many years has been that the contemporary theological problems of the churches are antedated by philosophical problems which need to be first addressed and resolved. Then, one may address the theological problems and their solutions. It was Leslie Dewart's (1922-2009) understanding of "dehellenization," a philosophical notion which he did not present as a negative concept meaning "unhellenization," that provided a conscious opportunity for me to begin to evaluate my philosophical inheritance and subsequently initiate a formation of a Creed of Life.

In short, I hold that a formation of a Creed of Life is tantamount to a conversion experience which requires that I reappraise the development of my Christian identity. (This conversion experience also requires I reappraise my understanding of the nature of God.) In my reappraisal I realize that I am living in a Western and global culture that has been envisioned and brought about by many complementary and

contested factors. Among them are physical, metaphysical, mental, human, and divine factors. Indeed, the contemporary culture in which I live seems to be constitutively over-determined given the combination of these universal factors. By “over-determined” I mean no one factor can be held responsible for the direction and development of the culture in which I encounter the presence of God and in which I subsequently determine my identity. Thus, I take this to mean that, in truth, God is not to be held solely responsible for everything that happens to me, or happens within the cosmos for that matter. That is to say that the formation of a Creed of Life I create a new perspective in interpreting God’s presence in my life. That is to say, the formation of a Creed of Life allows me to re-conceive of myself as a responsible co-agent in, and as a responsible co-creator of, my culture and society and, indeed, myself.

The institutional understanding of the Catholic church is as old as the first epistle of St. Clement, (circa 75-110), in which the church is conceived as a divine institution. According to St. Clement, the church is an institution with officers whose duty is determined by an official status within the institution. In this understanding, the officers of the church are analogous to officers of the state. To my mind, Jesus of Nazareth would never contemplate endorsing any form of church government patterned on a model whose leaders were analogous to the state.²³ Further, it is clear that the apostles believed that the end of the world would occur within their lifetime, and they made no provision for an institutional church in the sense that it exists today. Yet, the spirit that animates the church today is the same spirit that animated Jesus of Nazareth and the apostles. I further suggest that this same spirit moves theologians and philosophers to envision thresholds for Catholicity, not Catholicism, and the formation of a Creed of Life among the faithful.

In my dehellenized philosophy, I recognize three unique moments of insight. They are: 1) the realization of my status as a reflexive thinker, 2) the realization of my individuality, that is, I am “this” and not “that,” and 3) the realization of my personal integrity. That is to say, I am not equivalent to my body or to my soul each understood separately. I continue to become more deeply aware of the significance of these facts as I consciously develop my Creed of Life.

²³ Cf. Mark 10:35-45.

I, as a person, do not have the structure of an inanimate object. Rather, I am a being whose dynamic of life is greater than the sum of its individual parts. That is, as an incarnated and individuated person I am holistically constituted. The fact is that I am devoid of any fixed or final human constitution, but not devoid of being perpetually constituted as human as long as I am alive. Traditionally, a being constituted as a human being necessitates a hylomorphic explanation, but not necessarily of an Aristotelian sort. Concerning my identity as an agent in the world here is a question that I have asked myself: Do I undertake critically to construct my future, or do I remain satisfied with my pre-critical existence? The real problem for me is not whether the world will change or whether it will remain the same. The real problem for me is whether the world will change of its own accord, without my influencing presence, or whether it will be changed deliberately and consciously according to my Creed of Life.

In my understanding, then, when I create a “new” life-world and identity it is tantamount to transcending the “old” world. In undertaking a phenomenological approach to interpreting my experience, I have reached a level of self-consciousness and self-creativity that views the Hellenic dichotomy as an option not to be repeated. My Creed of Life manifests itself when distinguishing between “me” and “not-me.” That is, I am distinguishable within the physical world of beings, and I distinguish myself to myself as part of the dynamic world of my becoming. I continually individuate myself within my life-world and grow as a person with a unique identity. As I differentiate myself from that which is not myself, my consciousness is also heightened. Thus, I am a self whose identity is disclosed when I individuate myself from others. I am an entity which comes into being, and whose existence emerges through self-differentiation. In such self-differentiation I am contingent because I make myself “to be” within my environment, that is, I fashion myself creatively. The ultimate result of my consciousness is an awareness of my unique self-identity within a community of individuals capable of undertaking the same task in life. In short, I have created and assigned an identity to myself through a Creed of Life.

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Schultenover, David (1981). *George Tyrrell: In Search of Catholicism*. Patmos.

BACKGROUND READING

Sabatier, Auguste, *Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit* (1899), Hodder & Stoughton.

“Two systems of theology still confront one another: the theology of authority and the theology of experience. They are characterized by methods radically opposed in the scientific development of religious ideas and Christian dogma. To the solution of the question of method the present work is consecrated. At the present hour one method is dying and destined soon to disappear; the other is taking on ever more vigorous development, and is destined to triumph.”

Davis, Charles, *A Question of Conscience* (1967), Hodder & Stoughton.

“The purpose of this book is to take stock of my present position as a Cristian. On 4 December 1966 I decided to leave the Roman Catholic Church. For myself personally no decision could have been greater. ... To renounce the priesthood and to reject the Church I served — it was an almost unthinkable step. However, carefully thought out my decision might have been (and I did take pains over it), I need to write a book to get my bearings. But I also owe others a full account on my present convictions.”

Baum, Gregory, *The Credibility of the Church Today: A Reply to Charles Davis* (1968), Herder & Herder.

“Charles Davis has left the Catholic Church. ... While I have much sympathy for the complaints Charles Davis raises against the Catholic Church and I agree with most of the descriptions he gives of the present state of affairs, I have a totally different interpretation of what is actually taking place in the Catholic Church. Since Charles Davis has asked Catholic theologians to reply to his reflections and explain why the Catholic Church continues to make sense to them, I wish to discuss the issue of the Church’s credibility today and develop arguments that bring out the meaningfulness of the Church in the present age.”

Dewart, Leslie, *Religion, Language and Truth* (1970), Herder & Herder.

“A recent reviewer of my book, *The Foundations of Belief*, has suggested that I should write a ‘short, popular statement of [my] views, so that they may be made available to those [who may not have a professional level of] technical and historical knowledge.’²⁴ ... It is much more difficult to write for the ‘general public’ than for the specialist, concisely than at length, in outline than in detail. To do the latter requires no more than some knowledge of one’s subject; to do the former one must have a mastery of it. While I keep open the possibility of writing an elementary but thoughtful, brief but comprehensive, introduction to contemporary Christian philosophy from that viewpoint which appears to me to commend itself today to the attention of the Christian community, I have for the moment undertaken the much less ambitious project of setting down, in a form and compass which the non-professional but industrious reader might not find totally unacceptable (and with heavy reliance upon concrete and

²⁴ “The relative absolute,” *Times Literary Supplement*, February 5, 1970, p. 138.

practical issues which might illustrate them), only some of the key ideas of which I have made use in my earlier work.”

Baum, Gregory, (ed) *Journeys* (1975), Paulist Press.

“A few years ago, in the summer of 1972 to be precise, I participated in a theological workshop on biography and styles of theology. ... The lectures and the subsequent discussion convinced the participants that there is an important relation, not always clearly recognized, between personal life and theological interpretation and methodology. As there is a “sociology of knowledge” relating concepts and truth to the social background in which they emerge and prosper, so there ought to be a “psychology of knowledge” connecting people’s intellectual approach to the significant events of their biographies. ... A contact with our own life story is for us a way to self-knowledge and, beyond that, an entry into wisdom. While the collected articles demonstrate the profound effect that personal experiences have on the way we think, they also prove that it is impossible to make many generalizations on this topic. The same experience can give rise to a variety of meanings and interpretations. There remains something wholly unaccountable in the life of the mind. There are moments of discontinuity in our mental histories when we create an intellectual orientation as the unfolding of insights mediated by life experience, or as a defense against them.”

Dewart, Leslie, *Evolution and Consciousness: The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature* (1989), University of Toronto Press.

“Very few of the observations and concepts I have used in this investigation are original; indeed, most are not even new. What I have tried to accomplish here — the sort of task that philosophy had always deemed among its chief responsibilities, though in the anglophone world as I gather no longer — is mainly to arrange a large number of tesserae that, if taken one by one, are very familiar, into a single mosaic of a fairly comprehensive and unconventional philosophical synthesis. ... The purpose of this inquiry is to develop a philosophic theory of the origin and the subsequent prehistoric development of the specifically human characteristics of human beings. No justification need be offered for pursuing this objective. ... If we understood sufficiently well how human nature came into being, we would have mastered why the conditions of human life today are such as they are — which would, of course, facilitate our improving them. Undertaking to investigate the matter anew, however, and under philosophic auspices, implies what is much less obvious; that the explanations of human evolution devised so far by science are neither as satisfactory nor as useful as they might be, and that philosophy might help remedy those defects.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



EXAMINERS' REPORT

Date: 1 July 2010

Reference: ASOI/07/2010

Student: Allan Maurice Savage

Degree: Doctor of Letters

The candidate presented a portfolio of publications for assessment accompanied by a critical commentary in line for the regulations for the degree entitled "Interdisciplinary Insights Applied within a Theological Context". The portfolio was extremely wide-ranging and included work principally in the area of theology and secondarily in the areas of philosophy and psychology.

[The list of previously granted credentials at the degree level has been omitted.]

In addition to previous degree awards and ministerial appointments, the portfolio contained two testimonials from the Bishop of Algoma attesting to his appreciation and high regard for the candidate's work in ministry.

[The list of publications books, booklets and articles for evaluation has been omitted.]

The evidence of achievement in line with the Regulations for the granting of the degree of Doctor of Letters by published work was amply displayed. The high level and scope of the work undertaken was clearly evidenced and offered a contribution to scholarship that was both original and unusually broadly-based. It was clear that the candidate had thoroughly absorbed the corpus of existing thought in his chosen areas, and had shown himself to be both a cogent expositor of the scholarship of others and an original thinker in his own right.

The candidate supplied a detailed exegesis in his critical commentary that considered each submitted work in turn. The examiners greatly appreciated the role of this approach in clarifying the intentions, methodology and context of the works concerned. The candidate also included a list of the libraries which have acquired at least one of his books. He concludes that "their acceptance tells me they determined that my books 'have something to say' of academic value to the university community and perhaps to the civic community at large." The examiners endorse this conclusion and commend the work involved accordingly.

It is invidious and necessarily subjective to single out examples of particular work in a submission that was uniformly impressive, but the three books "A Phenomenological Understanding of Certain Liturgical Texts: The Anglican Collects for Advent and the Roman Catholic Collects for Lent", "Faith, Hope and Charity as Character Traits in Adler's Individual Psychology with Related Essays in Spirituality and Phenomenology" and "The Ecology: A 'New to You' View (An Orthodox Theological Ecology)" were held by the examiners to be of particular merit.

The examiners felt in summary that the submission was of an exemplary quality and reflected exceptional achievement over a sustained period of time. The award of a higher doctorate does not permit the conferral of marks of distinction, but in this case it was felt that the submission was such as to have merited this accolade were it to have been available.

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Percy Dearmer Professor of Liturgical Studies

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